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All that is God's is Good
An Anthropology of Liberationist Catholicism in
Garanhuns, Brazil

Alles van God is goed
Een antropologische studie van katholicisme van de
bevrijding in Garanhuns, Brazilië
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

PROEFSCHRIFT

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Utrecht
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus Prof. Dr. H.O. Voorma
ingevolge het besluit van het College voor Promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
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Marjolein Elizabeth Maria de Theije
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prof. dr A.F. Droogers, Faculteit Sociaal Culturele Wetenschappen, Vrije
Universiteit Amsterdam
Co-promotor: dr. W.S.M. Hoogbergen, Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen Universiteit
Utrecht

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Preface and acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the creation of this book. Unfortunately, the majority of those who merit the most thanks - i.e. the women and men who let me take part in their lives and faith - are illiterate, and will therefore not be able to read it. Academic anthropology, and especially Dutch anthropology, is an ambiguous activity: the professional stands with one foot in the everyday life of illiterate people, and the other in a culture where the written word is the only thing that counts - especially if it is not in Dutch. As I have found no means to bridge this gap, I will stick to the customary practice and thank my informants, friends, colleagues, and family in English.

I owe my greatest debt to the women and men of the parish of São Vicente, in Garanhuns, Brazil. Without their hospitality and confidence, I could never have written this book, and without their friendship and care, my stay in the field would not have been the profound and enriching experience it was.

I also owe much to my *conterrâneo*, Dom Tiago Postma. After our first meeting at Utrecht railway station in the summer of 1989, he took charge of part of the organization of my first field trip. When I arrived at Guararapes airport in the middle of the night, he was there to welcome me. He took me to his house in Garanhuns - the "bishopric palace", as he smilingly called it - and later arranged for me to stay at the seminary in Recife. Throughout my research project, Dom Tiago hovered in the background, like a guardian angel. He refused to interfere in my work, offered more hospitality than one could possibly expect, spoke to me only in Portuguese (to ensure I would adapt rapidly), and was often of great help when I encountered practical problems.

I lived in the "palace" for many weeks and became part of the bishopric family, of which *Dona Rosa Tenório* was the indefatigable centre. *Dona Rosa* taught me many things and revealed everything about her life I wanted to know - except her age. She was studying English at the time, but will never be able to read or even see this book, due to the eye disease from which she suffers. Irací, little Gilvan, Mauro and his family, Cida, and all the others who were or became part of the household in the palace (such as Gilvan from Gravatá) made sure that I always had a home base to return to after I had left them and created my own household in São Vicente.

In Colina, my companion for six months was Luzia. She taught me many things about being a poor, young Brazilian woman. The culture shock was immense, for both of us. I still remember with *saudades* the long evenings at the big round table (a relic from the priests who had lived in the house twenty years earlier), when she would tell me stories about ghosts and monsters. She taught me more than she realized. At the age of nineteen, Luzia decided to return to school to finish her primary education. I hope she will succeed in building a good life for herself.

After Luzia left, Ana and Lourdes de Andrade helped me with the most time-consuming household chores. My neighbour *dona Maria Soares* always kept a watchful eye on me from her yard, and this knowledge made me feel safe during the long nights I spent writing up field notes. Father Milton and his family and friends, especially Nita, accepted me without complaining about the inconvenience I caused (like incoming phone calls from non-Portuguese speakers). Several children in my street - especially Edivalda and Maria, and the kids of Ana and Lourdes - helped make my house a lively place.

Murilo de Araújo Noronha took much work off my hands by transcribing most of the recorded interviews, and researching the archives of *O Monitor* (the diocesan newspaper). He was also a critical discussion mate, and proved to be a valuable assistant in many research situations. His help went far beyond what could be expected of a person who is paid the meagre salary of a Brazilian secretary. On my first return visit in 1994, Murilo's mother - *dona* Quitéria Evangelista de Araújo - and his sisters Marisônia, Marta, Marcela and Marciana received me in their house and hearts. I hope our friendship is for life. Murilo also introduced me to several of his friends, some of whom were hardcore PT militants - the *basistas* I refer to in this book. They taught me a lot. Special thanks for this go to Paulo Roberto Batista da Rocha e Maria do Socorro Carneiro, José Petrônio, Edna do Nascimento da Silva and José Wellington Ferreira.

Whenever Garanhuns became too small for me, the community of Franciscan friars provided hospitality and diversion. The days spent in the countryside with them are cherished occasions. Of all the friends I made there, Marcos Couto deserves special thanks: he was a genuine *irmão*. An hour's drive away, Ríia Klerkx and Kiko Borges and their children, Raoni and Maíra, were always ready to offer me a bed and good conversation. Two hours' further away, in Recife, Cecília Mariz, Joaquim Tavares, Verónica Gitirana Gomes Ferreira, and Júlia and Olívia Morim de Melo took care of my well-being by providing apt solutions to loneliness, like our many trips to the beautiful beaches of Pernambuco. For a short period, my fieldwork coincided with Robin Nagle's in Recife, and it was very encouraging to share experiences and do archival work with her.

Several professional institutions contributed to the realization of my research and this thesis. In Brazil, my thanks go to Perry Scott at the Anthropology Department of the Federal University of Pernambuco, whose hospitality secured my permit to stay in Brazil. Cecília Mariz - who was then at the Sociology Department of the same university - became a true partner in research, and the discussion meetings with her students were inspiring.

In the Netherlands, Professor Geert Banck, Dr. Wim Hoogbergen, and other members of the staff at the Department of Cultural Anthropology of Utrecht University provided me with a research position and many facilities from 1989 to 1992. Geert and Wim also visited me while I was in the field. Wim was doing fieldwork in nearby Recife at the time, and his encouragement and down-to-earth comments were helpful, as was all the advice he gave me, beginning in 1985 when he introduced me to academic life. Geert and his wife Koosje came to Garanhuns from southern Espírito Santo. I will never forget their amazement when they arrived at the local bus station in '*a Suíça Pernambucana*' - the nickname of Garanhuns - in their summer outfits on a cold, winter afternoon. Geert's observations and sympathetic advice were an inspiration throughout this project.

NWO co-financed my first three-month trip to Brazil, and the Department took care of the financial means with which to carry out fifteen months of research. My thanks go to Kootje Willemse, Hetty Nguema-Asangono y Dankerlui, Marianne de Laet, Frank Jan van Dijk, and many other colleagues. I will always remember my time at the Department with warm feelings.

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I presented him with over a period of seven years. I also thank him for organizing the many discussion forums (like the PhD group) that helped me sharpen my analysis.

Many colleagues and friends have helped me over the years. Frank Jan van Dijk was a critical discussion mate right from the start. Our correspondence while in the field (he was working in Kingston, Jamaica, at the time) was also stimulating. Special thanks go to Kees de Groot, who shared his knowledge of the history of Brazilian Catholicism with me and saved me from several misinterpretations in Chapter 4. Els Jacobs was my sparring partner in many discussions on the topic of gender and religion, and will recognize the outcome of our ideas in Chapter 6. Peter Missler translated the first (Dutch) draft of Chapter 3, and proved to be a very critical reader. Our exchange of 'writing experiences', was encouraging and I hope that his book will soon be published. Jan Withagen kindly made the maps. Thanks also go to the members of OLA at Cedla, and the PhD group at the VU. David Lehmann and Cecília Mariz convinced me that my work provided insights into Brazilian Catholicism that were sufficiently worthwhile to bring the project to completion.

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1 Introduction

This book is about a Catholic practice that is meant to create a just society and to better the lives of poor people in northeastern Brazil. It is also about Catholic belief, which creates ritual bonds, offers solace and hope, explains the world and is in other ways meaningful for many believers. The scene is the parish of São Vicente, which is located in the diocese of Garanhuns in the state of Pernambuco. This introductory chapter clarifies the purpose of this book.

I will start by giving an account of an event that took place at the beginning of my research: the *assembléia diocesana* of Garanhuns - the annual meeting of the bishopric, during which pastoral matters are discussed and new plans are made. It was the first time I had participated in such a meeting and I did not understand all that was going on. In retrospect, however, the meeting concerned the major problems I will address in this book. In the second section, I will put forward the main questions that arose from my observations at the assembly and will be treated in this book. In the third section of this introduction, I will generalize and reformulate these questions using the theoretical discourse that informs this book. In the fourth section, I will elucidate my relation to the field situation and my personal baggage in the endeavour of doing research. In the final section I will further set out the organization of this book.

1.1 The *assembléia diocesana*

Some seventy-five people gathered for the 1989 assembly of the diocese of Garanhuns. The event was held in the city's old seminary, which dates back to the beginning of the century and is well suited for large meetings: it has a sunny courtyard with a veranda on each side, a large chapel, a dining room, several large rooms for meetings, smaller rooms for working groups and facilities for people to spend the night. The diocese is very large and reaching its main town, Garanhuns, is difficult for those who do not have a car - which meant everyone at the assembly, except the priests and one or two lay people. Attending the assembly were representatives of lay groups and associations, representatives of parishes, the clergy of the diocese, members of religious orders and members of the so-called specialized pastoral groups of this bishopric in the northeast of Brazil.

From Friday morning till Sunday afternoon, these people exchanged ideas and the experiences of their groups and parishes, discussed the pastoral policy of the diocese and celebrated Masses. The meeting began with a Mass, which was followed by a word of welcome from the bishop, Dom Tiago. The group that had prepared the event then explained some practicalities about the organization - ranging from the time schedules to the arrangements for sleeping and eating - and the planned leisure activities. Most were familiar with the set-up of the meeting because each year it follows the same pattern, which is based on the method 'to see, to judge, to act' (*'ver, julgar, agir'*). This method is derived from the pedagogical ideas of Paulo Freire, and is a much used tool in base communities (Wanderley 1984).

On the Friday, the participants started by discussing the progress made by their local groups as compared with the plans made the year before. This is the 'to see' part - the disclosure of the state of affairs. To make the conversation easier, the organizers divided the participants into small groups and assigned each group a room in the seminary building.

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At the previous year's meeting, the diocese had chosen the training of the laity and the formation of base communities as the major goals of pastoral policy for the coming triennial. However, the discussion group took the work under discussion in a more broad sense, and topics ranged from participation in the feasts of the patron saint of their parishes to the effectiveness of the courses which prepare couples for marriage. Also, in the groups the emphasis of the discussion very soon shifted from the achievements of pastoral work to the constraints encountered in that work. After a communal lunch, the groups brought the results of their discussions to the plenary meeting in the chapel. Spokespersons of the subgroups presented the state of affairs as seen by their group, and the assembly proceeded to produce two lists, one of the accomplishments and one of the drawbacks. This took the whole afternoon.

The next day - Saturday - the goal of the meeting was to evaluate the many works and projects; this was the 'to judge' part. The procedure was essentially the same as the day before, with parts worked out in subgroups and plenary sessions. On the Sunday, the participants reached the 'to act' part of the assembly and determined the main lines of diocesan policy for the coming year.

The diocesan coordination team had prepared the assembly's meeting. This team consisted of the bishop, three priests, three religious and three lay persons. Months earlier they had sent evaluation forms to all the parishes in preparation for the 'ver' part of the reunion. They had also invited an advisor (*assessor*) - someone from outside the local Church - to serve as a critical observer and resource person. On this occasion, Father Luís - a priest and sociologist from Recife, the capital of the state of Pernambuco - fulfilled the role. He also chaired the plenary parts of the assembly.

Most people participated actively in the plenary session, although the professional pastoral agents clearly took the lead in the discussion. They were generally young, well-educated people who worked for one of the specialized pastoral groups, for instance the Commission for the Land Pastorate (CPT, *Comissão da Pastoral de Terra*). However, some lay people contributed in an impressive way. One woman, leader of an ecclesial base community (CEB) in a rural hamlet, did a Bible reading even though she was unable to read. She had someone read to her from the Bible and then proceeded to recount it to the public in her own words. All in all, however, the lay representatives of the CEBs and other lay groups - such as the Charismatic Renewal Movement (RCC) and the Apostleship of Prayer - came notably less to the fore than the professional pastoral agents.

The days were long and tiring, especially for those unaccustomed to long periods of listening and remaining seated. The solution to this problem took the form of short breaks during which music was played, so that everybody could sing and even dance a little. These breaks gave the meeting a pleasant atmosphere of brotherhood and unity. A ten-page leaflet was distributed containing the lyrics of forty-four religious and secular songs. One was "*O xote das meninas*", a song from the 1950s written by northeastern musician Luiz Gonzaga and recently recorded by Marisa Monte. Its text concerns the puppy love of a young woman. Another song was "*Pelos caminhos da América*" ("*Along the Roads of America*"), one known from a record by Milton Nascimento.

Most of the songs were new to me and I found their texts surprising. A favourite of the participants was "*I am happy in the community*", which sounded like a traditional song from the Northeast. One verse goes:

Community in the Northeast / Struggle for liberation /
To form a chain / To break the oppression

And another verse goes:

The poor made a plan / This is what they want to gain /
Fight for their rights / For life to become better¹

In this song, 'community' refers to the base communities of poor people that were the goal of the pastoral plans under discussion at this meeting. This song, like many others, reveals a revolutionary spirit in the interpretation of the gospel.

Although the meeting was set up according to the well-tried concept known to most of the participants, it seemed this assembly was different from previous ones, because the general atmosphere was one of excitement. Although part of the reason for this may have been the pastoral issues under discussion, November 1989 was an exciting month for all of Brazil: for the first time in twenty-five years, presidential elections were being held and consequently everybody was under the spell of politics. As the result of an unhappy coincidence, the assembly started on November 17th, just two days after the elections and while officials were still counting the votes. So while most participants attended the workshops and plenary meetings, others were in the courtyard glued to a portable radio as they listened to the latest results of the vote count.

JOURNEY OF THE YEAR

Inside the seminary building, however, the discussions went on. The subject was the *Caminhada do ano* (the progress the Church had made that year) and the aim was to see whether the local Church was 'on the way that Jesus talked about'. More specifically, the subject was the evaluation of the policy concerning the organization and training of lay people. After the lengthy consideration of the questionnaires - first by a layman from the coordinating team and then by the assessor, Father Luís - the question 'What kind of Church do we have?' was discussed.

The assessor called the base communities the 'spine' of the local Catholic Church. In 1988, the participants of the assembly had chosen 'organization' as their central goal for the coming three years. 'Organization' referred to the internal life of the Church and to the society in line for liberation, as well as to the mission of the 'People of God in the world'. The assessor reminded his listeners that at the Conference of Latin American Bishops (Puebla 1979), the bishops accepted proposals that opened the way for a 'Church of brotherhood, a Church less hierarchical'. According to the assessor, this means participation by the laity and co-responsibility for the Church. The mission of the believers in the world is to strive for a just society through pastoral action in service of the organization of society according to a vision of liberation. In the base communities, the laity are prepared for this task and are equipped with the knowledge and practical tools they need in order to carry it out.

However, the laity present seemed to be more cautious and less self-assured than the assessor. They insisted on a long-term perspective, because transformations are difficult to achieve. Although the Church 'is in communion with the mission of Christ, who

¹ "Comunidade do Nordeste / Luta pela libertação / Pra formar uma corrente / Pra quebrar a opressão. And: Os pobres fizeram um plano / Isto eles querem ganhar / Lutar pelos seus direitos / Para a vida melhorar."

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came to earth to construct his Kingdom', the Church of Garanhuns is still in transition, 'on the way to become a Church built on the participation of all believers'. Other representatives of groups in the parishes also emphasized that it is not so easy to organize to work for a just society and that they felt they still had a long way to go. Most thought that catechesis and training people in the communities would contribute to the creation of a new Church, because evangelization and catechesis 'have joined divine justice with social justice'. However, many difficulties are still to be conquered.

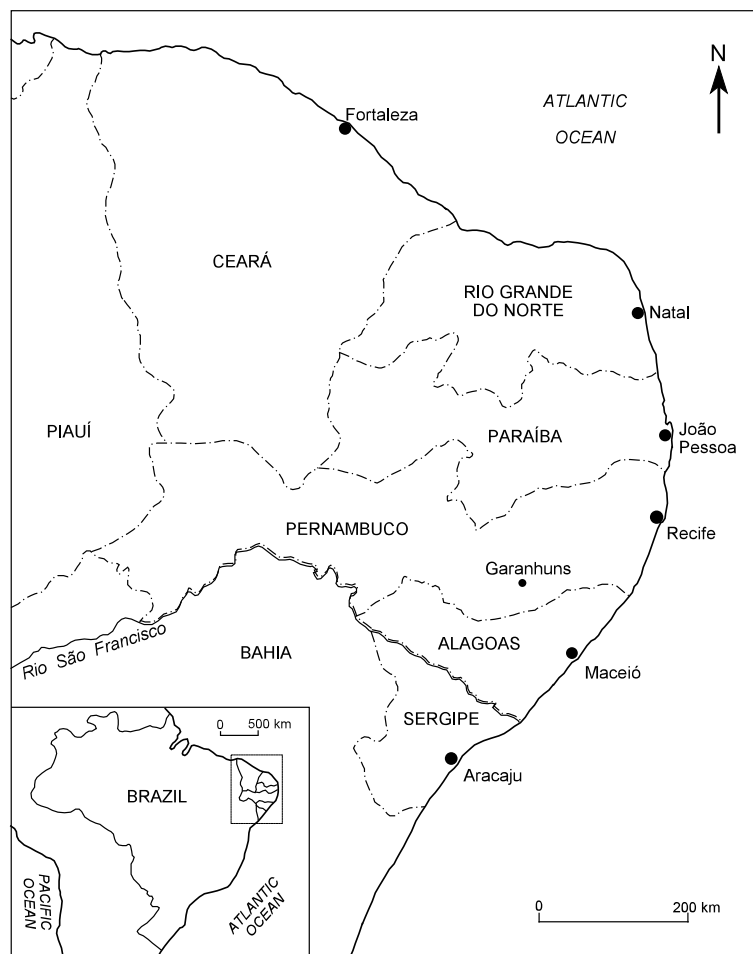
According to the laity, the most important problem is the people's resistance to the liberationist message brought to the communities by laymen and priests. A woman said that the difficulty is at the grassroots level, because not everybody accepts the 'new way of the Church'. Another drawback signalled by some laymen was the attitude of members of the clergy. In several communities, problems arose because the priest did not accept that the people of the base communities had their own ideas and were relatively self-sufficient in religious matters.

The entanglement of religion and politics was another important point in the discussion. The assessor had no doubts about the connection between the two and he made his opinion clear: political consciousness-raising is the most important goal of the training of pastoral agents. A well-organized Catholic community draws its conclusions based on its religious convictions. However, this means not only national party politics but also defending one's rights in labour unions and at the municipal level. For the lay people and clergy present, Father Luís' message was not new. Some participants praised the information on the candidates for the presidency the pastoral team had prepared and published in *Comunicando* (*Communicating*), the periodical of the diocese. Nevertheless, not all agreed with the natural bond between religion and politics implied by the words of the speaker. The bumper stickers 'Vote for Lula' on the cars of several priests had already been a topic of controversy: they had received ample attention - which included a photo of Father Jaime's car - in the regional newspapers as well as in a national weekly magazine (*Diário de Pernambuco* 1989a, *Veja* 1989).

The group gathered around the radio in the courtyard served as a catalyst for more discussion among those attending the assembly. For many in Garanhuns and the surrounding area, the elections had an extra meaning. The candidate of the workers' party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*; PT) - Luís Ignácio da Silva ('Lula') - was born in a small hamlet near Caetés, only 25 kilometres from the town of Garanhuns. It was therefore inevitable that at this diocesan meeting, religion and politics would mix. The excitement over the growing chances for the PT candidate thoroughly disrupted the meeting. At the same time, however, some participants were grumbling about how the subject was now 'politics more than religion'. Others regretted but accepted the emphasis on political activism. One woman said that if this was what the bishop wanted, she'd go along with it. Another woman didn't even seem to notice the unrest and was very satisfied: she told me that although she liked all aspects of the meeting, she liked the Masses most of all. In any case, the spontaneous feast that took place on the last evening of the assembly, when Lula had reached the second round of the elections, was not appreciated by all the participants.

1.2 Liberationist Catholicism in Garanhuns

The *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) has divided Brazil into five regions. One of these is the Northeast, which comprises the states of Alagoas, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Pernambuco. Garanhuns is one of the eight bishoprics in the last named state. The Brazilian Catholic Church also uses this regional division, but has added further subdivisions. Garanhuns is part of *Nordeste 2* (Northeast 2), which includes the dioceses of the states of Alagoas, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte and the archipelago Fernando de Noronha (See Map 1).



Map 1: Northeast of Brazil

When I went to Brazil in 1989 to look for a suitable location for my research into Catholic base communities and other lay groups, various people suggested Garanhuns because they considered it a 'progressive' diocese where I would find many base communities.

In Brazil, 'progressive' is a much used term to denote a form of Catholicism that draws on liberation theology. However, the political meaning of the word makes it unfit for the analysis I will follow in this book (cf. Lehmann 1996:5-6). I will therefore use the expression 'liberationist Catholicism', referring to the ideological sources of the movement in liberation theology. I will come back to the question of terminology in the following chapter.

The signs of the liberationist orientation of the diocese are manifold. The yearly *assembléia* is one of these signs, as it shows that the diocese is democratically organized: the laity participate in the policy of the local Church. The emphasis on the training of lay leaders can also be interpreted as a sign of a Catholic clergy that is seeking to involve lay people in the Catholic practice. The stress in diocesan policy on the formation of base communities further reveals the preference for a specific kind of participation of the laity in religious affairs.

THEOLOGICAL BASE

Generally, Catholic base communities are seen as the pastoral result of the 'preferential option for the poor' established by the Latin American bishops at the Medellín conference (1968). For many theologians and clergymen in Brazil, this option also meant political involvement. They "(...) set out to reinvigorate the Church by 'going to the people' and bringing to them a message of empowerment - an empowerment inspired by revolutionary reinterpretations of the Bible and the life of Christ (...)" (Lehmann 1996:44-5). The reasoning included the idea that in order to construct the Kingdom of God on earth, Catholics should start to work in their own daily environment. The poor should take the lead in this project, since they are loyal to God because of their unity and confraternity.

The theological bases for the preferential option for the poor were formulated in liberation theology, the central ideas of which can be summarized in three points that mark important differences from conventional Catholic theology (cf. Lehmann 1991, 1996, Levine 1992, Smith 1991). The first is that theology cannot be separated from the socioeconomic and political contexts. Second, liberation theology holds the premise that God makes a 'preferential option for the poor'. Although God loves rich and poor alike, he favours the poor in their struggle for liberation from the oppressive structures of capitalism created by the rich. The third and last characteristic of liberation theology is the view that salvation is to be found in this lifetime: it is not a reward to be obtained after death. Thus, in this theology the symbolic meaning of poverty is transformed and a strong inclination for political action is formulated (Levine 1986:11).

Theologians saw base communities as the most appropriate means with which to create a context where poor Catholics could develop an awareness of the social and political situation in their country and translate this into appropriate social and political action. Social awareness was the path to salvation. Religion was seen as a source of cultural, social and political change. Inspired by Bible readings critical of the social structure, the poor would be empowered to join political parties and trade unions, and to demand services and infrastructure from local governments and thus play their part in the realization of a just society here and now. The notion that came to symbolize this process was *conscientização*, which is sometimes translated as conscientization, but better rendered

as 'raising the consciousness of'.²

Over the last few decades, Brazilian Catholicism has attracted much attention from both believers and scholars because of the propagation of this political interpretation of its beliefs. Various dioceses in the country have the reputation of being 'progressive', meaning that the bishop and the clergy are fervent defenders of the model of the base communities and often take part in local, regional and/or national politics. During the military dictatorship (1964-1985), this attitude received much admiration, although not from those who were in power. Dioceses headed by a liberationist bishop promoted base communities, and many parishes were reorganized according to this decentralized model. Although Dom Tiago - who was Bishop of Garanhuns from 1974 to 1996 - does not belong to the group of the most famous liberationist bishops of Brazil, he is known regionally for his sympathy for liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor. Insiders know of his support for human rights projects. In Pernambuco, Garanhuns is considered a 'forward' bishopric, while the state as a whole is quite liberationist, thanks to its longtime archbishop, Dom Hélder Câmara (see Chapter 4).

Because of the literature I had read in preparation for my research, much of what I heard at the assembly sounded familiar. Here, the people of God were the poor who were joining forces to realize the construction of a just society. These people were putting the lessons from the gospel into practice here and now. To them, religion was more than prayer, Mass, beautiful stories and Latin songs. Clergy and laity together were discussing the social and political consequences of their religious beliefs. These people were involved in something bigger: the construction of a just society.

DIFFERENT PREFERENCES

Apparently, liberationist Catholicism had a lot of influence in Garanhuns. At the assembly I witnessed a critical view on Brazilian society. More than that, these people had ideas about how to bring about change. People representing all kinds of local groups and movements shared religious ideals that inspired their actions. Their combativeness and the efforts they made were impressive.

Yet, of course, the assembly was only one event in a much larger religious order and I could not assume it was typical of this order. On the contrary, the extent of the influence and the results of the liberationist efforts still had to be researched. Several directions for such research could be deduced from my observations at the assembly. The first point, then, is how the liberationist policy of the diocese affects the day-to-day religious reality of ordinary Catholics.

Second, the events during the *assembléia* suggested that even if the ideals were shared, there were considerable differences of opinion concerning the means and ways to carry out the general policy. The young people of the pastoral services put more emphasis on the political aspect of their religious choice, glued to the radio as they were. These were *basistas*, members of the movement called *basismo* by Lehmann (1990).³ *Basistas*

² Lehmann (1990:134 note 62) calls the term an "ugly neologism." Nevertheless, I will sometimes use it in this text, or will use the Portuguese word.

³ Mainwaring used the terms in his book published in 1986 (in Portuguese in 1989) to refer to "a somewhat naive belief in the capacity of the base (grass-roots) to resolve its problems without the assistance of intellectuals, political parties or other outside support" (1986:206). Lehmann, however, made *basistas* and *basismo* into central concepts of his work (1990, 1996).

combine 'sensitivity' to the beliefs and practices of 'the people' with political activity (Lehmann 1996:5). Lehmann reserves the word for a broad, intellectual movement. In my usage, it is limited to the intellectuals who take a clear political stance within the local Catholic church of Garanhuns. These are mainly younger religious and lay students who combine religious action with political engagement in social action groups, such as the land pastoral or the human rights movement. Although the *basista* voices were the most dominant at the meeting, other ideals were also defended, such as the desire to pray more rather than to engage in politics. Furthermore, I soon learned that the *basistas* were over-represented at this assembly, for they make up only a minority of the members of the diocese. For many other people attending the assembly, the preferential option for the poor meant that the Catholic faithful should show compassion for the poor. Yet others held that religion is a field of its own and that it should be spared contamination by earthly matters. These are just some examples. The preferential option for the poor takes many forms in the practice of everyday Catholicism. These observations draw attention to processes internal to the Catholic order regarding the choices and organization of activities, and the participation of different actors in this.

Third, with respect to the result of the ambition to transform society, it was easily observed that notwithstanding the influence of liberationist Catholicism, the concrete effects of the pastoral work had apparently been modest. In the discussions, the participants conceptualized their task as a long-term project. They were on the path, but the goal was still far away. They tried to find answers to such questions as 'What are the obstacles our communities face?' Furthermore, outside the walls of the seminary I had seen urban neighbourhoods with open sewers and without electricity or fresh water. Because people had been evicted by landowners, I saw straw huts strung out along the highway near rural hamlets. All this was part of the social context of this diocese.

The Northeast is the most afflicted region in Brazil. A combination of barren soil and unpredictable rainfall makes life in the back lands (*o sertão*) extremely harsh. There is also socioeconomic inequality, with a small group of landowners still busy enlarging their property and many landless workers and subsistence farmers living in poor conditions. Social injustice continues to be the norm. Large aid programmes have not changed the situation of the poor, because the financial and technological assistance mainly favoured the big landowners (Rönick 1986). The *zona da mata* of Pernambuco (the wet zone near the coast) is known for its equally difficult conditions in the sugar cane plantations, where workers are only needed for part of the year and are supposed to fend for themselves during the rest of it. The diocese of Garanhuns encompasses parts of both the *zona da mata* and the dry *sertão*. The town itself is situated in the small, gentler strip - the *agreste* - between these extremes. Thus, all forms of poverty that characterize the Northeast can be found within the diocese.

Those who expected a revolutionary transformation of society were guided by ideological convictions rather than realism. I am not one of those 'disappointed researchers' (Lehmann 1996:12-13). I realize religion does more than try to change social reality. At the assembly the people, too, showed many examples of this. They sang, performed rituals, were moved by testimonies or sermons, showed joy, brotherhood, sorrow and anger. There are certainly good reasons for the current religious order in Garanhuns - some of them intended, some not.

LAY GROUPS

The directions for research suggested by the events at the diocesan assembly are interconnected in various ways in the daily practice of the Catholics who make meaning out of their beliefs and the social and economic situations which they face. Anyone who calls her- or himself a Catholic, is part of the Catholic universe. In this book, however, I concentrate on those who chose to go one step further, i.e. those who opted to become members of one of the many lay groups and associations within this broad universe of Catholics. This focus offers me two specific viewpoints. In the first place, these groups are collective enterprises of religious action. All groups in the Catholic realm have their own typical religious discourse and practices. These particular interpretations of Catholicism are part of the local religious order. An analysis of the relations between the groups and their position in the local Catholic realm is a way to discover the practices and meanings that influence the process of creating this order. However, the same goes for the individual Catholics who take part in the meetings and rituals of the groups. At both the individual and the collective level, actors produce and reproduce beliefs and religious practices.

This brings me to the second reason I chose members of lay groups as the focus of my research. These individuals are more likely to be conscious of the choices they make and to ask themselves about the motivations and explanations for different elements of their religion. They have made a deliberate decision in a context where 'everybody' is a Catholic. In other words, it is likely that these actors 'theologise' (Harrell 1986:101-2) about their religious convictions and ideals, and about their collective and individual practices related to the religious.⁴ They are the 'knowledgeable ones' (Fernandez 1982:79). As the boundaries of the field, I have chosen the limits of a parish. A parish is the smallest organizational unit of the Catholic Church, and within its boundaries we find several representatives of the ecclesial institution and many forms of lay organization.

By focussing on the lay groups in the parish of São Vicente, we can try to understand the workings of religious ideas and practice in general, and the potential of liberationist discourse in particular. How does liberationist Catholicism affect the social and religious practice of the laity? How is this related to the historical, local, social, institutional and cultural context in which the actors construct their religious lives? What does this mean for the religious beliefs and practices of the faithful? In sum, this book is an ethnography of the construction of religious meaning that includes not only the ideas and actions of the propagators of liberationist Catholicism, but also the other convictions that we heard at the 1989 assembly of the diocese. It also includes the opinions and discourses of those who were not present at the meeting, i.e. the majority of Catholic lay women and men from São Vicente.

The data in this book can lead to many accounts. First, the actions of the people involved in the religious activities in the parish are a reflection of their interpretations and mediation of liberationist Catholicism. Second, the ideas and discourses these people produce in relation to their action are another type of narration. The arguments that scholars construct in the ethnographies on these actions and discourses form a third type of

⁴ In my analysis I use the connotation 'the religious' also as a noun, to refer to 'religion' and 'the religious order'. In chapter 3, I will explain why I made this choice.

commentary on liberationist Catholicism and the way it is put into practice. All these different kinds of accounts are reflected in this book. Both the deeds and discourses of the people are, however, represented here in a way informed by scholarly discourse. Therefore, I need to deal with the theoretical orientation of my argument before I elaborate on the composition of this book. First, in the following section, I will explain the major thoughts of the anthropological theoretical discussions that inform and guide the ethnography presented here. Then, in the fourth section, I will explain some aspects of my role as anthropologist in the production of this ethnography.

1.3 Anthropology and religious practice

At an analytical level, the issue here is a process of religious change and its relation to the social world. Religion has always been an important field of study in anthropology. In it, basically two approaches have been dominant: one emphasizing the social function of religion as a means to legitimize, reinforce and reproduce social relations, and the other focussing on the way belief and practices are used to create meaning in the believer's life. Both approaches thus refer to the relation between the religious and daily life, though in different ways.

RELIGIOUS CHANGE

The religious change under study was meant to contribute to a fundamental transformation of the social reality in a predetermined direction. The problem I am posing here is thus - at a very basic level - a question of the relation between ideology and social structure, and that between ideal norms and actual behaviour. This question of the relation between ideology and action is an old one in anthropological theory. With the development of their profession, social scientists have learned to see the complexities of society. Culture and ideology can no longer be seen as blueprints for social arrangements, nor as a simple reflection of the social structure in a given society.⁵ In the 1960s and 1970s, the study of culture and society began to focus on change, process, contradiction and inconsistency, rather than on congruity and regularity (cf. Moore 1975:217-18). It is now common knowledge in anthropology that disorder and contrast are as much a part of behaviour and ideas as order and repetition are.

As a consequence of the emphasis on change and incongruity in the study of culture, the concept of culture has itself undergone profound changes. We can no longer see it as 'shared' by all members of a society. The many different voices heard at the assembly showed that speaking of one invariable Catholic ideology is impossible. The bygone, orderly abstraction of symbols and meanings from a society has lost its coherence and internal consistency to "culture as multiple discourses, occasionally coming together in large systemic configurations, but more often coexisting within dynamic fields of interaction and conflict" (Dirks, Eley and Ortner 1994:4). The multiple discourses, however, are also connected to each other, suggesting at least a partial sharedness, or continuity and coherence. It is the task of the student of culture to unravel the complexities of these connections.

⁵ Although anthropologists probably never did this as strictly as is often suggested in critical theory, as Brightman (1995) argues.

Talking about culture in this manner makes it all very abstract, while in reality the subjects are human beings made of flesh and blood who mostly do 'ordinary' things. They eat, sleep, work, love, take care of their families and go to church. The big, abstract questions can only be studied by grounding them in the micro contexts of everyday life. To find answers to the many questions raised in the previous section, what we need to know is what these people do and think, and why.

Laity, clergy and *basistas* are all actors - acting human beings. This is a coin with two sides. They are agents in an active sense: they reproduce and produce the culture in which they live. Their wishes, interests, aims, meanings and other subjective concerns motivate their actions. As agents, however, they are also subjects in a passive sense, because they are to a large extent historically and culturally constructed. The structure formed by historical processes, cultural forms, social relations, economic conditions, political relations, etc. influences their endeavours and puts constraints on the possibilities and potential outcomes of their actions. Both positions - emphasizing either the active or the passive subject - have caused much theory-making in anthropology. At one extreme, people are thought to be free to do and think what they want; at the other extreme, they are totally at the mercy of historical and cultural structures. Both positions are at odds with common-sense feelings of 'how the world works'. Thus, if we are to understand what people do and believe, and why, we need a theoretical framework that includes both sides of the coin. Moreover, what we need is an approach that addresses the interplay of the constraining as well as the enabling aspects of culture and structure.

PRACTICE

Among the most appealing contemporary approaches used to tackle these old anthropological themes is what Ortner (1984) called the practice approach. In this approach, the analysis focuses on understanding what people do or have done and what they do or do not believe, by finding the markers of these actions and beliefs in the social practice (Ortner 1989a:11). The central problem is the mutual determinations of agents and structures. We must try to understand "how the system constructs 'actresses and actors' and how these agents realize and transform the system" (Collier and Yanagisako 1989:29). An analysis of the actions and ideas of the people involved in Catholicism in Garanhuns may offer us the clues needed in order to understand what I saw and heard at the assembly. What religious world is behind all this? Who are the people that construct it, and why do they do this? Most importantly, *how* do they do it?

A practice approach is not a theory in the strict sense. Nor does it offer a clear-cut template to put over reality in order to answer all our questions. It is rather a set of analytical tools with which to look at the world (Collier and Yanagisako 1989:27, Ortner 1984:127). As a framework, it is still in the process of being constructed, as Kamsteeg (1995:25) remarked. Nor is practice a neat unit of thought developed by one author. Many scholars have developed theories that can be considered practice approaches, although the work of Ortner has inspired me most of all because she systematically addresses key aspects of the approach. In her book on the history of the rise of celibate monasteries among the Sherpa of Nepal, she convincingly shows the articulation of culture, political economy and human agency in the process of the founding of these Buddhist institutions. Furthermore, her ethnographical case concerns religious transformation, just as mine does. In this book,

I will construct my own version of a practice approach. The basic questions and the basic approach brought forth in this introductory chapter will be dealt with step by step in the rest of the book. Throughout, theory and ethnography will both inform and question each other. The framework gives direction to the questions to be asked as much as the ethnographical reality does. I will set out in this section the basic conceptual tools used by 'practice anthropologists'.

The project of practice approaches, as Ortner (1989a:12) summarized it, is "seeking the configuration of cultural forms, social relations, and historical processes that move people to act in ways that produce the effects in question." This configuration is usually called 'structure' or 'the system'. Religion can be considered as one such system. Any system - including a religious one - unites norms and values, emotions and perceptions, rituals and discourses, and political and economic arrangements (cf. Ortner 1984:148). To be able to 'live with the system', the actor translates this structure into a subjective world. We can see culture as the product of this translation (cf. Ortner 1989a:18). However, it would be a mistake to create an opposition between culture and structure, because then 'structure' becomes connected to the passive actor and 'culture' to the active actor - which would bring us back to where we started, i.e. with a dichotomy between determination and manipulation, between structure and agency. The aim of a practice approach is, on the contrary, to overcome this analytical distinction and uncover the relationships between the two. The key to this is the concept of practice.

The practice central to this approach is action in relation to structure. Thus, structures are not seen in terms of themselves, their inner logic, consistency, or the way they are reproduced, without paying attention to the ways in which they emerge from the activities of human beings (Moore 1975:220-1, 224-239, Ortner 1989a:195). Therefore, structures encompass the totality of social and cultural relations.⁶ However, some elements of the system are more important than others. Influenced by Marxist and feminist theories, practice approaches are mainly interested in issues of power and inequality. The observation that the deeds of women often contribute to women's oppression (for instance, foot binding or female infanticide) demanded an explanation, and the 'system' became a notion that helped one understand "the social construction of women's desires, perceptions and possibilities" (Collier and Yanagisako 1989:28, see also Rosaldo 1980). In the words of Ortner (1984:149): "At the core of the system, both forming and deforming it, are the specific realities of asymmetry, inequality and domination in a given time and place." Since authority and relative power are part of most social relations, the actions of the actors are in most cases related to structure. Nevertheless, not all human activity is called 'practice', because the connection with the context of structure is fundamental. Thus, practice theorists share the idea that 'the system' is very powerful and even has a determining influence on human action (Ortner 1984:146). Yet this does not mean the thoughts and actions of the actors are totally predictable. The actor is "loaded" with structure (Salman 1993:105), or "loosely structured" (Ortner 1989a:198), but has "room for manoeuvre" (Siebers 1996:25).

⁶ Hence, the distinction between 'culture' and 'society', often meaning a (Marxist) distinction between base and superstructure, disappears.

Ortner (1989a) distinguishes three sorts of practice that are important for the analysis.⁷ The first is the routine and repetition of everyday actions. How are structures of thought and action present in these actions, and consequently how do actors reproduce these structures in everyday life? The second type of practice is present in the wishes, plans and interests of the actors. The question then is how these subjective motives are formed, in the context of systemic stimuli and constraints. The third manifestation of practice is the most complex, because it combines the other two. It is also the crux of the approach and provides the clues needed in order to explain the destiny of the liberationist project in the diocese of Garanhuns. In practice, the consciousness of the actor may change due to new contextual circumstances. Here, the dimensions of change are produced. Thus, practice follows from, reproduces and transforms structure. Agents and structures are connected in a process of "mutual determination" (Collier and Yanagisako 1989:29).⁸

In sum, a practice approach seems the appropriate procedure to apply in order to get inside the process of religious change taking place in Garanhuns. "The structural questions here concern the relationship between these novel contexts of practice and the existing social order: What are the intended and unintended structural consequences of alternative practices?" (Ortner 1989a:195). In the following chapter, I will specify the practice approach I intend to follow, adapting it to the case under study.

1.4 Fieldwork in Garanhuns

I conducted fieldwork in Garanhuns and the surrounding area for seventeen months. As such, this book is an account of my observations of rituals and actions people carried out in the parish, of the events they organized and of the stories they told me about their beliefs and experiences. Yet I, too, lived in the parish and many things I saw and heard were not directly related to the religious - at least, not at first sight. Nevertheless, many of these aspects have found their way into this book. What I observed was highly influenced by what people told me. They gave me all kinds of explanations for the things they were doing. Moreover, they produced ideas and discourses in relation to their actions, which are in themselves accounts of the Catholic practice I was studying.

Like any ethnography, this book is an interpretation - here of a particular religious order - of my experiences and the data I collected during my stay among the people who live in and with this religious order. The account of the anthropologist is only one of many possible ones. Nevertheless, being an anthropologist, my account is (inevitably) highly informed by scholarly discourses. My account is, however, also grounded in my personal experiences as a researcher living and working with the people of Garanhuns. Therefore, I will elaborate on the methodological and circumstantial information as background to the analysis to come.

A crucial circumstance was my contact with Dom Tiago Postma, who provided me with a convenient operating base in Garanhuns. He made it possible for me to become acquainted with the clergy and the *basistas* of Garanhuns within a short period. In

⁷ Various other authors have developed concepts to account for the 'practical' aspect of structures, of which the idea of 'habitus' from the work of Bourdieu is probably the best known, although it is a problematic concept (cf. Brightman 1995:535-539, Free 1996:398-401).

⁸ In a later publication, Ortner used the concept of 'serious games' to help understand this connection. See Ortner 1996.

Garanhuns, I first lived in the episcopal palace, which priests from faraway parishes always visited when they came to town. In Recife, I stayed in Várzea in the seminary of SERENE II (Regional Seminary of the Northeastern Dioceses), among the students. It was 1989 and I witnessed the closing of this liberationist seminary by the new Bishop of Recife, Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho.

However, I was determined to exchange the comfortable palace for a simple house in the neighbourhood, because I wanted to live among the people. I was lucky to find a house in Colina, a poor neighbourhood of Garanhuns, right across from the church and the priests' house. The proximity of his house provided a certain amount of security, a television I could watch if I wanted to, and a telephone number where my family could reach me. Living near the church also had the important advantage that I could keep an eye on all the events that took place there. Furthermore, it was a central place, and just by showing my face on the street and in the church, people soon got used to my presence.

Of course, it was not possible for me to live in the same poor circumstances as the people of the lay groups. For me, the whole endeavour was a temporary situation, and I had more money and possessions than they will ever have. There was my car, for example, and the fact that I could always return to my homeland if an emergency arose. I regularly spent the weekend with friends in Recife, or went to Pesqueira to spend the day with a Dutch friend who lives and works there. In other words, I could escape from the sometimes quite depressing situation in the parish. There was always this ambiguity about my situation, both for me and for my neighbours and friends in the communities. Nevertheless, it was a felicitous decision to go and live in the neighbourhood.

However, living there was not enough to make me a member of the community. My position as a woman living alone caused much distrust and misunderstanding. The first explanation people found for the anomaly was that I was a nun. Initially, I did not like this assumption because I did not want to be associated with the institutional Church. Later, I saw the advantages of it: it safeguarded me from advances from men and provided protection against violence in general. When I came to know people, I could easily explain who I really was and what I was doing, thereby correcting the false impression that I was a representative of the Catholic Church.

According to most people, however, it was just not done for a woman to live alone. Furthermore, since I was clearly not poor I had the moral obligation to hire a live-in *empregada* (maid) to run my household. After my neighbours and acquaintances had proffered a countless number of suitable girls, I hired Luzia, an eighteen-year-old from a *sítio* in the parish. Her parents had just lost everything - thanks to the Collor government confiscating savings accounts - and thus her contribution to the family's income was very important. Her company meant that even at home I was immersed in the ethnographical experience. Through Luzia I learned much about the moral and social world of the poor in Garanhuns.

For my position as a researcher, Luzia's company did not make me that much less odd to the community. My gender caused a lot of disbelief. The concept of a woman from abroad who says she is married but lives alone was just too much for most people - after all, what kind of husband lets his wife do such a thing? I suppose my husband's *machismo* will forever be questioned, even though his first visit - after I'd spent three months

in the field - corroborated my femaleness. I had not been aware of the obstacles that my being single would create. After my husband left, however, the attitude of the local women changed: the range of conversation topics grew tremendously, and from then on included marriage problems, sexual relations, fertility and children. Once, while discussing an amorous problem with me, Marisa summed it up nicely: she said "Now I know you're a married woman, too, I can tell you this because you'll understand it."

However, I did share certain characteristics with the population of the parish. First, my religious background: I had a Catholic upbringing and these roots simplified my participation in the religious rituals and events. It also provided a base for comparison with reference to ritual and discourse. Many people were interested in finding out how things were done in my country, and this led to interesting discussions. Their ideas about other countries and other people revealed perceptions of their own society. João, for example, believed that "the Netherlands is a rich country, because the people live in community," a situation which is still far away in Brazil. Secondly, I'm the daughter of a farmer, and my interest in and knowledge of agriculture often provided a good topic for conversation.

My strategy for coming into contact with people was simple. As I was living in the neighbourhood and going to meetings at the church and community centre, people soon got used to my presence. After I had interviewed a few community leaders suggested to me by the priest, the ball started rolling and I found I could easily make closer contact with members and leaders of other groups. For my first visit to a rural community, I usually got a ride from the priest. After I had learnt my way around the rural area, I would go without the priest but take Murilo, my research assistant, in order to make introductions easier. After that, I would usually return alone to do the interviews and attend meetings.

The data presented here are not based on regular visits to all communities in the area. Instead of trying to cover the whole parish, I chose to limit the number of groups so that I would be able to develop a closer relation with their members. In this way, I hoped that in time I would be able to gain an insight into the deeper motivations, the individual perceptions and emotions and the social processes within the groups. There were also practical reasons for this limitation. It was difficult for me to visit all communities, due to the long distances involved, the bad roads and the danger of assault or breaking down in the middle of nowhere. Especially at night, I would never travel alone. In the urban part of the parish, several CEBs were difficult to reach and people again and again warned me not to walk in certain parts of the neighbourhood alone or at night.

Only some of the interviews and meetings were completely recorded and transcribed: the tape recorder broke down several times and it usually took days or even weeks before it was repaired, and sometimes the batteries ran out in the middle of a conversation. On other occasions I chose not to use any recording device because I did not want to turn an encounter into a formal occasion. Sometimes I was simply not prepared for an interview, but decided to hold one when the opportunity arose. I suppose most anthropologists gather their data in this rather unorganized manner. I hired Murilo - a (mathematics) student at the local university - to transcribe the tapes. In all, I made more than three hundred entries in my notebook, more than half of which are reports of conversations and (more structured) interviews. The rest are observations and the results

of archival research.⁹

Like Murilo, several members of the base communities and other lay groups became friends after a while. To preserve interviewees' confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms throughout this book. Apart from some exceptions - such as Garanhuns and Caetés - the geographical names of the research area are also fictitious.

1.5 Organization of the study

In many cases, the extent of the impact of the liberationist religious message is hidden behind routines and seemingly ordinary practices. In order to make the analysis I propose, I will first direct our attention to the social and historical context of the events and processes that are connected to the activities and beliefs of the laity in the parish of São Vicente. The practice approach informs to a large extent the choices I made while carrying out the research and writing this book. My analysis and argumentation take various steps, mostly coinciding with the chapters of this book.

As a first step, I will concentrate in Chapter 3 on the routines and everyday practices related to Catholicism in São Vicente. This introduction to the parish will add yet other forms and meanings of 'being a Catholic' to the various opinions heard at the assembly. This calls for a discussion of the conceptual boundaries of Catholicism and religion in general. This chapter is also a description of the context of the religious order in its most basic form, as it appears and acquires form and meaning in the lives of the actors.

In Chapter 4, I present the religious order in its historical context. I show how different campaigns of the clergy to form and reform local Catholicism have left their traces in Garanhuns. I relate the contemporary variation in religious forms and meanings to different cultural politics of different actors. The clergy are a group of actors who repeatedly tried to establish specific practices and ideologies. They initiated campaigns according to the ruling ideas and policies in the national and global Church. However, local circumstances obliged both clergy and believers to adapt directions to their own needs and possibilities. Both the general policies and the local results are presented in this historical chapter.

At a certain historical moment, pastoral agents developed the new, liberationist interpretation of Catholic beliefs. However, this ideology had to gain concrete shape, content and meaning in the daily lives of Catholics. Some actors picked it up and worked it out, while others adapted it to local circumstances and yet others ignored it. I describe in Chapter 5 the contemporary religious order relating the groups to the succession of religious campaigns and the reception of and reactions to these. This analysis will also show that people who are not the obvious candidates for leading reforming campaigns may develop their own strategies and practices. Together these small and large campaigns contribute to the formation of the local religious order.

In the end, the goal of cultural politics is to change the minds of people. Analysing the effects of cultural politics is therefore no easy task, because not all results of a campaign are readily visible. Although the organization of the parish and other religious practices may have changed over time, the meanings attached to, for instance, symbols and rituals

9 When I refer to these records, I do so with a number. The numbers are composed as follows: yymmdd-serial number. In the case of interviews, this is indicated. Observations and unrecorded conversations are referred to as records.

need not have changed, or may have gone off in another direction. In the case of liberationist ideology, the formation of base communities may be a sign of successful politics. However, remembering the many different voices at the assembly, it seems the formation of these lay groups is no guarantee of uniform religious meanings. Chapters 6 and 7 therefore address the contents related to the various forms described in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 6, the category 'laity' or 'members of groups' is differentiated. The majority are women, and I will argue that gender is a crucial factor for the results of cultural politics. The specific position of women in the social and religious structure shapes equally specific interests, needs and wishes. These motivate their actions within the religious order, and therefore produce and reform this order. Furthermore, questions of authority and prestige in relation to religious meaning-making are addressed. The position and actions of the clergy in relation to the laity are treated in relation to their impact on the religious order.

In Chapter 7, the most discussed aspect of contemporary Brazilian Catholicism - its political potential - is dealt with. For many Catholics in Garanhuns, the political stance of the Church is subject to controversy and is therefore an interesting topic based on which one can learn more about the results of the liberationist campaign.

Before I can embark on this analysis, I need to dedicate a chapter to the state of the art of social science research on contemporary Brazilian Catholicism. Although I have already given a brief overview of the anthropological theory that motivated my analysis in this book, another body of literature also had a huge influence on my research. Over the last ten years or so, various studies have been published on base communities and Church policy. Religion has also received much attention in the Brazilian media. These popular and academic works influence not only the researcher, but also the phenomenon under study. However, they also form an additional reason to define the research topic in the way I have defined it. In reading about Brazilian religion - and in particular about Brazilian Catholicism - I felt a growing frustration with the absence of ordinary people from the scholarly accounts. This failure by many studies of Brazilian Catholicism to include the religious as it is lived, has mystified the real meaning of the liberationist ideology. The high expectations of the social transformation power of liberation theology were more often than not based on wishful thinking, rather than on a realistic knowledge of the social practices of ordinary people in the parishes and dioceses of Brazil. I therefore give a brief analysis of these interpretations and their consequences in Chapter 2. This analysis also serves as basis for the further elaboration of the practice approach used in this book.

2 The study of liberationist Catholicism in Brazil

The main policy of the diocese of Garanhuns is to organize and sustain base communities, which puts it in the category of liberationist dioceses of Brazil. During the past decades, liberationist Catholicism in Brazil has received much attention from social scientists. Not surprisingly, scholars' interpretations of the Catholic reality are almost as diverse, complex and full of contradictions as this reality itself. The many assessments offered influenced not only academic discussions, but also the phenomenon of a liberationist Church. The intellectuals involved in the liberationist Church project were often also sociologists and, moreover, the whole project can be interpreted as a sociological project (Lehmann 1996). In turn, my interpretation in this book builds on the work done previously by others. This chapter therefore contains a brief summary of the most important topics treated and positions taken in the debates on liberationist Catholicism in Brazil.

I do not intend to give a comprehensive survey of all the literature on the phenomenon of CEBs and changes in Brazilian Catholicism. Instead, I will give a short overview of the approaches most commonly used. In doing so, I will justify my own methodological and theoretical choices. I organized the studies of liberationist Catholicism into three groups, according to the focus of the works. First, I will discuss studies that concentrate on institutional transformations, secondly on interpretations which emphasize the social and political aspects of the religious changes, and thirdly on the works which stress the cultural aspects of the religious choices of Brazilian actors. After summarizing and discussing these approaches and commenting briefly on their results, I will propose my alternative theoretical and methodological framework, based on a practice approach. This chapter starts with a short sketch of the liberationist Church in Brazil, through a characterization of the phenomenon of CEB.

2.1 Liberationist Catholicism in Brazil

The formation of Catholic base communities is considered the most important development in the Brazilian Catholic Church of the past decades. From the 1960s onwards, more and more nuns, priests and bishops 'made the preferential option for the poor'. These religious persons started to defend political and economic reforms aimed at changing the position of the growing group of poor in the nation. Theologians unfolded a new vision on social justice, in which the poor fight for the construction of the Kingdom of God by demanding what is their right. Because the poor will encounter many obstacles on their way, it is the task of the Church to assist them in this project.

The assistance of the Church is directed at helping the poor to become conscious of their position in Brazilian society. The means by which this consciousness-raising is sought are the *comunidades eclesiais de base*, the CEBs. In these small groups, people read the Bible and learn to compare what they read with their daily life. This inspires them to start to struggle for social justice, for example through activism in social movements or political parties, and to demand participation as full citizens in Brazilian society.¹

¹ This strategy earned the Brazilian Church the reputation of being a liberationist Church, serving to many both in Latin America and beyond as an inspiring example. Especially its political consequences attracted attention from far beyond the borders of the country.

DEFINING BASE COMMUNITIES

To be able to assess the tidal wave of empirical studies and theoretical discussions that appeared in the wake of the theological formulation of liberationist Catholicism, it will be useful to take a moment to look at some characteristics of the concept 'base community'. Although much was written on the new Catholicism, little consensus seemed to exist on the form, content and meaning of the phenomenon. The first problem to arise was the lack of a univocal definition of base community. Because of the disagreement on the character of the CEBs, the scale and range of this new spirit in Brazilian Catholicism also remained unclear. The ambiguousness I found in the literature also prevailed in the pastoral practice in Garanhuns. Therefore, I will first explore the definitional problem and the related question of numbers.

The lack of an unequivocal definition of the subject largely causes the disagreement and indistinctness on the impact of base communities in Brazil. Scholars have written whole books on 'What a base community is' (See e.g. Betto 1985). The most thorough treatment is probably Azevedo's (1987), who dedicates an entire chapter to the explanation of the three terms making up the *comunidades eclesiais de base*: community, ecclesial and base (1987:57-117). The 'community' refers to the localism of the groups and the collectiveness of its organization. Base communities are 'ecclesial,' according to Azevedo (1987:66), because "the faith of their members and their oneness with the faith of the Church is the primary catalyst of their formation." The most problematic part is ostensibly the term 'base'. Some scholars explain this as referring to the poor and oppressed in a Marxist sense.² Others (e.g. Mainwaring 1986) use 'base' (or 'grassroots') for both pastoral agents and CEB members, which conceals the differences between these actors (cf. Mariz 1994:17). Taking into consideration the different meanings of the three terms, it comes as no surprise that many definitions of the phenomenon CEB are in use. Here, theological definitions are not very helpful to the social scientist. As ideological constructs and abstractions they often show little relationship with the social reality. Sociological definitions range from the very loose to the more specific. For example, Mariz (1994:17) considers CEBs as "Catholic groups of poor people that attempt, through meditation and prayer, to foster a view of religion that is socially and politically engaged". Sometimes more criteria are added, as I will show below. It is also quite common in books and articles on base communities for authors to give no definition at all. In Brazil everybody 'knows'.

To apply one or another definition of CEB to social reality is yet more complicated than making up the definition. The diocese of Garanhuns has the same problems with definition as the social scientists have. People use various terms, both in daily speech and in documents. The most common notions are *grupo de evangelização* (evangelization group) and *comunidade* (community), and they use these interchangeably without differentiating the two. Furthermore, to add to the confusion, strictly speaking not every *comunidade* is a *comunidade eclesial de base*. The term *comunidade* is a broad term. It can designate a neighbourhood or hamlet, in other words, geographical and in that sense 'natural' community. However, it can also mean *comunidade eclesial de base*

² Azevedo (1987:110, note 47) argues that the term 'base' as it has come to be used in 'base community' actually originated in Marxist vocabulary "and then found its way into modern discourse".

in a religious context. In documents of the diocese of Garanhuns, often the more neutral term of evangelization group is preferred to base community.

In private conversations, priests and other pastoral agents more often than not talk about 'real CEBs' in order to distinguish between groups engaged in activities directed at the transformation of the social situation of its members from those not engaged in this type of activity. Father Milton, the priest of the parish of São Vicente, explained to me he calls a group a CEB

if they show at least one or two things that are expressions of organization. For example, they organized a communitarian garden. This is when they leave the level of praying to go to the level of the communitarian organized action.³

Such a statement shows that local pastoral agents emphasize political and social action, thus adding specific goals and criteria to their definition of a base community. By doing so, they confirm the distinction made in the research recently carried out by CERIS⁴ (Valle and Pitta 1994). In this nationwide quantitative research, the authors make a distinction between CECs and CEBs.⁵ CEC is the abbreviation for *comunidade eclesial católica* (Valle and Pitta 1994:10) and refers to groups the person who filled in the questionnaire identifies as such. Usually this was the parish priest. Thus, the exact definition of CEC was left to him (Valle and Pitta 1994:10). It can be deduced from the answers that the criteria used to identify CECs are related to the occurrence of Bible reflection groups, communitarian preparation for the sacraments, the organization of Masses (without the presence of a priest) in the community, and the eventual presence of a communitarian council (Valle and Pitta 1994:13). CEBs are groups with an additional openness to the social transformational dimension of belief and Church-related practice⁶ (Valle and Pitta 1994:14). The indicator they used to diagnose this openness was an open question on the participation of the community in organizations, movements and struggles for better life conditions (Valle and Pitta 1994:14-5). The line between CECs and CEBs is thin, and difficult to maintain if one realizes the many possible ways of participating in organizations and movements. Furthermore, groups may also change their activities over time. Valle and Pitta (1994:61) conclude that constructing a system of classification into two or three ideal-types is impossible. The reason the diocesan polity in Garanhuns does not use differentiation at all probably lies in this practical difficulty of categorization. The diocesan coordination team tries to create an organizational frame for all groups to participate in, and hands out the material to be used in the groups. It depends on the wishes and possibilities of the specific groups whether or not they extend their activities to the secular realm.

THE NUMBERS

Observers are divided not only on the form and content of CEBs, but also on the scale and significance of the phenomenon in Brazilian society and the Brazilian Catholic Church.

3 Interview 900426-43 / sheet 3-4: "(...) quando eu tenho uma ou duas coisas, pelo menos, que é uma expressão de organização, por exemplo, o pessoal organizou a partir da fé, da leitura da Bíblia, o pessoal organizou uma horta comunitária, é quando passa do nível da reza para o nível da ação organizada comunitariamente."

4 Centro de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais (Centre for Religious Statistics and Social Investigations) founded by the National Bishops' Conference (CNBB) in 1962.

5 The authors say it is a questionable distinction, but since it was often used in the pastoral work in the 1970s and 1980s they nevertheless chose to use it (Valle and Pitta 1994:14).

6 "(...) abertas à dimensão sócio-transformadora da fé e da prática eclesial."

Over the years, various estimates have been published. In 1974 the number of CEBs was estimated at 40,000, and in 1979 at 80,000 (Pierucci 1982:48); later publications use either the latter number or that of 100,000 (Antoniazzi 1989, Sigmund 1990:25). These authors state that at least two million - but possibly three to four million - people are involved in base communities (Della Cava 1989:143, Hewitt 1990:140-1, Lernoux 1989:130).

What is notable among these estimates is the figure of 80,000 - a figure that emerged from the mouth of a bishop, was recorded by a North American political scientist and ended up dominating the literature on CEBs. However, the bishop had used the number as a target figure and had set it this high in order to deter the adversaries of liberation theology and liberationist Catholicism.⁷ The theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff gave the highest estimate I found in print. They estimated the number of CEBs in Brazil at 150,000, with a total of four million people participating in the groups.⁸ As Novaes (1985b:233) observed, the numbers depend on who does the counting. However, taking into consideration a national population of 130 million in the 1980s and 150 million in the 1990s, even the highest figures mean that just a small percentage of the Brazilian population is involved in base communities. Nevertheless, even the lowest figures may have been too optimistic, as Daudelin (1991) maintains. He calculated a maximum of 10,000 CEBs with about 250,000 people. Daudelin's suspicion was not affirmed by the most recent research, however. The above-mentioned nationwide quantitative research was published in 1994 and came up with a number of 61,000 CEBs (Valle and Pitta 1994:60). Although only 40 percent of the parishes returned the questionnaire, the researchers believe their data are representative. Extrapolating from these data, they estimate the total number of Catholic communities at 100,000 (Valle and Pitta 1994:12), of which 61 percent can be considered CEBs (Valle and Pitta 1994:60).

CEBS IN GARANHUNS

I do not know if all the parishes of Garanhuns participated in the CERIS research carried out by Valle and Pitta. The regional division of the Brazilian Church to which the diocese belongs (*Nordeste 2*) was among the regions that collaborated the least (Valle and Pitta 1994:12). However, the national average of sixteen communities per parish and the regional (*Nordeste 2*) average of seventeen (Valle and Pitta 1994:44) is achieved by the diocese. In total, the diocese has about five hundred groups, according to a member of the diocesan coordination team. The man added, however, that he did not know the state of development of each group, nor the type of activities in which they are involved. The only reason he knew this number of five hundred is that this is the circulation of the booklet the diocese prepares for the groups. Five hundred communities in twenty-six parishes comes to an average of nineteen per parish.

As I explained above (page 20), the national survey of CERIS distinguishes between CECs and CEBs, and local pastoral agents make a similar distinction. Applying this distinction in the diocese of Garanhuns, seventy of the five hundred communities would be considered 'real CEBs, doing more than praying', one of the priests told me. This comes to only fourteen

7 This scholar was Ralph Della Cava, and I heard this story from Cecília Mariz, a sociologist of Brazilian religion.

8 Various newspaper articles, 1980, 1981, 1992, referred to in Baldissera 1987:60.

percent of the communities in the diocese. In comparison to the data of Valle and Pitta, this is a very low number.⁹

In this book I take base communities to be small groups of Catholic lay people who regularly meet in order to read and discuss the Bible and apply their reflections on it to their daily experience. Generally the participants live in the same street or hamlet and under the same social and economic circumstances. Technically, the same method is used in the meeting as during the diocesan assembly I described in Chapter 1. The reading and reflection are the 'to see' part. Then follows application to everyday experiences - the 'to judge' part. Finally, the group reaches the 'to act' stage if eventually they decide to develop activities in order to change the situation. This broad description leaves room for considerable diversity among the groups. The question of the political activism of groups is something I leave open for this moment. Whether the groups develop socioeconomic or political action depends on many factors. Furthermore, the social and political involvement of base communities can be perceived as gradations on a scale, changing over time and from location to location. In the rest of this book I will therefore use the terms 'CEB' and 'base community' for both evangelization groups without any extra-religious activities at the time of my research and for groups which do have political or socioeconomic practices. With this choice I diverge from the more theological or pastoral opinion that a broad definition removes any meaning from the ideal of 'real CEBs' (Benedetti 1996:45).¹⁰ My aim is not to develop pastoral ideals, but to study the social reality of the religious groups. By choosing a broad definition, for the moment I leave open the many possibilities regarding the form and content of the groups. Of course, it is very important to pay attention to the differences between CEBs. However, a strict classification beforehand offers no advantage for the analysis of the practice of the groups and the results of it. Nevertheless, it may be clear from this discussion that the question of definition has consequences for the analysis.

2.2 Studies of liberationist Catholicism

Many studies have been published on different aspects of liberationist Catholicism in Brazil. It is no easy task to create order from the available sources and all the ideas and analyses these contain. Nevertheless, and running the risk of generalizing, I will attempt to distinguish the main tendencies to be found in the literature on the topic. To that end, I divide the works of social scientists into three categories according to the focus they take and the context in which the writers chose to describe the CEBs and recent religious changes. The first group relates the religious changes to the institutional development of the national and international Church. I call this the institutions paradigm. A second body of works takes Brazilian (secular) politics as a realm of reference. I will discuss this under the name politics paradigm. A third group takes the religious as a point of departure and often has a local base of reference. This is the culture paradigm. Of course, many studies establish links between the institution, national political participation and local

9 Valle and Pitta do not provide the data for the regional distribution of CEBs.

10 Benedetti observes a broader definition which serves to eliminate resistance within the hierarchy. Using a looser definition could even lead to the conclusion that the number of CEBs is growing, he adds, because CEB then signifies subdivisions of parishes centred on the religious service (Benedetti 1996:45). Probably, to Benedetti my definition would come under this category.

religious cultures. My categorization is merely meant to indicate tendencies and to recognize general lines in the available literature in order to evaluate scholarly analyses before I proceed with the explanation of the approach I have chosen in this book.

INSTITUTIONS

Most studies on the recent changes in Brazilian Catholicism try to understand these from an institutional perspective. Scholars have analysed religious change in terms of the Church's attempts to preserve its influence over society. Many important data resulted from this work, and I will extensively draw on this body of literature in my historical reconstruction of the local Church in Garanhuns (Chapter 4). Studies following the institutional paradigm typically focus on the relations between state and Church, developments internal to the Catholic institutional organization, or the role of particular groups or elites within the institutional transformations.

Concerning the relations between state and Church, the most important question addressed was why and how the Brazilian Catholic Church developed into the most liberationist of the continent. Most authors concentrated on the specific political situation in Brazil. In an overview of the changes in the Catholic Church during the twentieth century, Della Cava showed that the political forces in Brazilian society time and again demanded new responses from the Church. Sometimes the Church cooperated and sometimes it resisted, but always the main motivation for its reaction was the defence of its own institutional interests (Della Cava 1976:43).

Changes in the orientation and internal organization of the Brazilian Catholic Church - such as the preferential option for the poor and pastoral action to promote CEBs - are a way to establish and maintain an influential position in society. Analysis of the why and how of this institutional attitude is extensively documented in the works of such sociologists as Adriance (1985), Bruneau (1974, 1982), Della Cava (1976, 1986), Hewitt (1991), and Neuhauser (1989a). So the formation of base communities is a logical step inspired by "(...) an organizational crisis, provoked by environmental changes which produced a willingness among Brazilian bishops to innovate" (Neuhauser 1989a:234). The shortage of priests and the threat of Protestantism are among the constraints that prompted these institutional reactions.

Studies focussing on the institutional aspects of Catholicism rely heavily on the analysis of the ideas and behaviour of elites. The main sources of information for these studies are the attitudes and discourses of selected religious actors - mostly bishops and theologians - and the documents generated by these actors. The implicit idea in many studies was that society would change according to the ideology formulated by this ecclesial elite. In a similar vein, the statements recorded in interviews with bishops and theologians serve as data for the ethnography of the practical organization of base communities (see e.g. Adriance 1986). Just as the works focussed on the development of the institution, the studies of the elites draw on a Weberian conception of religious change and the role of prophets in the dissemination of a new religious practice in society. The fate of the movement ended up in the hands of a few actors.

Not only official doctrine and statements of bishops but also activists from the realms of the clergy and laity received ample attention. Contemporary studies continue to concentrate on these specific groups of actors. Lehmann (1990) showed the important

role of the *basistas* - the carriers of Catholic *basismo* - who act as the intellectuals of the movement. Research by Adriance (1991, 1995) has shown the importance of nuns, friars and priests in mobilizing the people. The risk of concentrating the analysis on selected groups of actors lies in interpreting the data as being representative of a whole movement. In this way, the analysis still focuses on the power of the institution to transmit a new interpretation of the religious: the stimulation provided by the clergy becomes the criterion with which to assess the 'success' of base communities.¹¹

This focus on institutional transformation brings about a blind spot to the influence of factors other than institutional support or resistance to specific ideas and practices. The poor Brazilians who were the target of the renewed pastoral action in particular, play no active part in this conception of the transformation of Catholicism. At most they react to initiatives on the part of the institutional Church. Mainwaring (1986, 1989) recognizes the importance of lay groups. However, he does not discuss the meaning of the groups for the laity. It is striking to see that even when researchers state that they have analysed the practical application of liberation theology in base communities, the perspective is often top-down. In his book on CEBs in São Paulo, Hewitt describes the activities of the groups in terms of reaction instead of action, for instance when he says members of groups participate in charity work "where this was offered" (1991:48). Furthermore, assessments of the results of liberationist pastoral action were often measured by research among 'successful' members of groups (eg. Adriance 1986, Dabul 1984).

The bias in favour of institutional liberationist initiatives also had the effect that other developments in Brazilian Catholicism escaped the attention of many scholars.¹² Base communities and liberationist pastoral action were often isolated from other forms of lay organization and participation, be they old or new groups.¹³ Notable is that until recently there had been no research on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (RCC). Although this movement started in the early 1970s and rapidly spread throughout the country, little attention was paid to it in studies on Brazilian Catholicism. Except for the research carried out by CERIS on the authority of CNBB in 1974 (Oliveira et al. 1978), the existence of this lay group was largely ignored by social scientists.¹⁴ Furthermore, the few studies that were done were carried out by intellectuals from the liberationist Catholic groups, such as Oliveira (et al. 1978) and Benedetti (1988). Machado (1994:60) says that this explains why they put much emphasis on the differences between Catholic Charismatics and Pentecostals. In her opinion it also explains why they describe the RCC as a means used by the conservative forces in Catholicism to combat the liberationist

11 Another version of the approach stressing the institutional aspects of religious innovations holds the opposite vision: changes in Brazilian Catholicism sprang from the people. This view is found among Marxist-oriented scholars. Here, it is not the intellectual or clerical elite that receives the credits for transforming the Church and comes to represent the new Catholic practice, but the chosen people of God, i.e. poor and oppressed Brazilians. This point of departure can be found in most theological expositions on base communities and liberationist Catholicism. Social scientists regard this view as highly idealistic. Although nobody denies the influence of poor Brazilians on the religious transformation - because the situation of the poor incited many clergy and theologians to develop their liberationist attitude - it is not justified to attribute the Catholic ideological renewals entirely to the actions of the laity.

12 This may have been an intentional omission.

13 For an interesting, recent exception, see Lehmann 1996 who emphasizes the relationship between liberationist Catholicism and other movements in the global Church.

14 The popular press did pay attention to the growing number of charismatic prayer groups throughout the country. See e.g. Isobé 1991b and Diário de Pernambuco 1991, 1992.

Church. Only in the 1990s did more literature become available (Benedetti 1988, Machado 1994, Prandi and Souza 1996), but by then the presence of the Charismatic movement was felt in every parish in the country.

To summarize, we can conclude that, in spite of the important information it generated, the institutional approach also exposes several shortcomings if we want to use it to come to an understanding of contemporary religious practice in Brazil. Moreover, the focus on elites proves to be an obstacle because it does not explain why and how hundreds of thousands of ordinary people also became involved in the project. The studies of Brazilian Catholicism focussing on the institutional aspects of liberationist renewal tended to ignore the reception of the ideas at the level of the (religious) life of the laity. This blind spot in the analysis can be attributed to the fact that a direct line was assumed between ideological formulations and the behaviour of elite groups on the one hand and the religious practice on the other. This assumption made further research unnecessary. This explains why scholars gave so much emphasis to the presence or absence of institutional support for lay groups. It is not my intention to downplay the importance of institutional encouragement or authorization; in this book I will show several instances of its role. However, it will also become clear that the underestimation of the processes taking place at the local level, and especially the role of the laity in the modelling of the religious, weakens our understanding of the kind of religious change under study here. How ordinary people translated the ideological changes into religious practice should also be part of a study of base communities. Furthermore, the complexities of cultural production were underestimated and this reinforced the assumptions underlying the institutional approach.

POLITICS

The second tendency to be discussed in the study of Brazilian Catholicism is the politics paradigm. Although the line between different approaches is often difficult to draw, I distinguish those works focusing on the institutional organization of Catholicism from those focusing on the political dimensions of the groups. Given the pretensions of liberationist Catholicism, it is no surprise that this political side of the religious ideology became a central topic in sociological and anthropological research. The CEBs are a means with which to incite political consciousness and activism in the participants and therefore it is relevant to study them in this context. The focus on the political aspect of base communities found different applications. First, there are the works that focussed on the secular political transformations arising from the liberationist ideology. Other scholars studied the CEBs in the context of social movement theory. In both cases, the research is guided by the quest for the potential of the groups to bring about a transformation of society through political activism (Adriance 1986, Baldissera 1987, Doimo 1984, 1986, 1992, Hewitt 1990, Lehmann 1990, Lesbaupin 1980, Mainwaring 1987, Novaes 1985b, Paiva 1985, Petrini 1984, Scherer-Warren 1987, 1993, Smith 1995, 1996).

The authors who focused on politics tried to assess the impact of the *conscientização* efforts in CEBs on (the consolidation of) democratization in Brazil. Often the focus is on explicit political ideas. The underlying assumption in this kind of work seems to be in line with the ideas and ideals of the activists involved in base communities, namely that religion determines political behaviour (cf. Ireland 1991, Burdick 1994, Adriance 1986). For it was the premise of many theologians and clergy and pastoral agents that participation

in CEBs would make people conscientious and give the poor strength to take the future into their own hands. In this respect, the concepts used are problematic. Other scholars have correctly pointed out that politics may be more than an observable affiliation with political parties or trade unions (Burdick 1994, Escobar 1992). In assessing the impact of base communities on the (progressive) voting behaviour, contemporary analysis leads to modest conclusions (Pierucci and Prandi 1996b).

As I said, scholars also approached CEBs through social movement theory, and so assessed base communities on their potential to motivate people to engage in political struggles. Here, it is not possible to give a comprehensive overview of all (new) social movements theory. First, the concept of social movements has no univocal meaning (Scherer-Warren 1993:18). For some, any collective action involving a demand or a protest is a social movement. At the other extreme, only those collective actions intended to transform society are considered a social movement. Second, over the past decades the theoretical orientation of social movements research has had many different focuses. Scherer-Warren (1993) distinguishes four periods. In the first (the 1950s and 1960s), the dominant tendency was the Marxist macro structural analysis in terms of development and dependency theory. In the following period (the 1970s), a transition started from economic determination to multiple factors influencing the political relations in society.

Only in the third period (the 1980s) did the concept of social movements become central and was the analysis of global historical processes substituted for intensive research among specific groups. This had the effect that analysis taking the social actor as a central focus replaced analysis in terms of social classes. Now, instead of the revolution, cultural and political transformations in daily life were examined (Scherer-Warren 1993:17). Assies (1992:28) points to the fact that this shift "also served to keep up hopes" after the 1982 elections, in which the social movements and *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) did not achieve their expected electoral triumph. This meant that while the expected social transformation could be postponed, it was already in the making at the local level. Here again we see how social science interpretation and ideological politics are interconnected. After the defeat of the PT in 1989, this effect probably only gained more weight. In contemporary analysis (the fourth period, the 1990s) scholars further elaborated research among specific groups; in this, they also considered so-called anti-movements and processes of social exclusion in the study of the organization of daily life and civil society (Scherer-Warren 1993:20).

Furthermore, one can observe a systematic critical evaluation of earlier analyses and a rethinking of concepts and theories. Several results of this new consideration given to previous research are also relevant to the study of base communities. I will indicate two of these.

First, the attention given to the role of mediators in the process of popular organization and the democratization of Brazilian society. Mediators are the intellectuals - pastoral agents, priests, friars and nuns - who generally come from outside the community to help base communities in their endeavour to organize and undertake social action (cf. Scherer-Warren 1993:49). This recognition of the role of the *basistas* is important for the understanding of the political process taking place in the religious realm. The notion of mediators included a more critical treatment of these 'elites' than it did in the institutional paradigm, because now the focus was on the process of mediation and the effects of

this cultural process on the construction of collective action (Escobar 1992:70). However, by limiting the mediation to a small group of religious specialists, this research does not totally avoid the shortcomings of an elitist approach.

A second characteristic of contemporary analysis is, as Escobar observes (1992:82), that social movements theory is becoming more sensitive to "the deeply cultural character" of social movements. He underscores the plural character of social movements "as economic, social, political, and cultural struggles" domains among which often no clear or visible boundaries are distinguishable.

To understand these processes (...) one must look at the micro level of everyday practices and their imbrication with larger processes of development, patriarchy, capital, and the state. How these forces find their way into people's lives, their effects on people's identity and social relations, and people's responses and "uses" of them have to be examined through a close engagement and reading of popular actions (Escobar 1992:82).

In pointing to the complex relations between everyday life and larger structures, Escobar calls for an approach that gets the best of all tendencies in analysis and establishes meaningful connections between these parts. A practice approach specifically tries to find a way to address the complications of this connection. Before I elaborate on my version of a practice approach, however, I must discuss the third group of researches I distinguished.

CULTURE

This third group comprises the ethnographical studies that consider processes on the micro rather than the macro level (cf. Long 1990:4). I call this the culture paradigm. The authors take the religious field as a domain, often in connection with a strong emphasis on the daily life of ordinary believers. The choice for religion as an entrance is at the same time the most important difference from the works of the other two groups. In both the institutional paradigm and the politics paradigm, religion is considered in function of something else, i.e. the institution and the political organization, respectively. Since CEBs are religious groups they have to compete not only with (other) social movements and with political parties as is rightly implicated, but also with the many other groups in the Brazilian religious marketplace. The tendency I want to highlight here seeks to describe and understand religious changes related to base communities within the context of the religious realm of life. Such notions as *campo religioso* (religious field) (Brandão 1986, Benedetti 1988, Macedo 1986) or religious arena (Burdick 1993) serve as a delineation of the subject.¹⁵ The emphasis on the daily life of ordinary believers connects these researches to the social movements approach discussed above.

In order to study the meaning and practices of base communities, anthropologists and sociologists have done extensive fieldwork in urban neighbourhoods, mostly in the peripheral parts of large cities, such as São Paulo (Hewitt 1991, Macedo 1986, Petrini 1984), Rio de Janeiro (Burdick 1993, Mariz 1994), and Recife (Castro 1987, Mariz 1994) but also in smaller towns in the Northeast (Ireland 1991) or the interior of São Paulo or Goiás (Brandão 1985b), and more recently also in the Amazon (Adriance 1995).

Scholars make all kinds of cross-cuts in the religious field. Some take the CEBs as

¹⁵ Several authors explicitly do not take 'religion' but 'popular culture' as the field of research. However, religion is then perceived as one of the most authentic expressions of popular culture. This use of concepts is far less arbitrary as it may look to some. In the following chapter I will go further into this question.

the centre of their research and describe how Catholicism is given form and meaning in these groups (Castro 1987) or how the CEBs organize collective social action (Adriance 1995, Macedo 1986, Petrini 1984). Traditionally, such studies are 'single-religion' monographs, as Burdick (1993:7) observes.¹⁶ Other scholars take the whole religious field and compare the different options Brazilian citizens have when they are looking for religious meaning. The work of Brandão (specially 1980 and 1985b) is an intriguing example of the processes at play in this marketplace, showing, among many other things, that the CEBs have to compete with many different religious groups and traditions. These other groups are most often identified as the fast growing Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, and the diverse Afro-Brazilian groups (Burdick 1993, Ireland 1991). Different religions are then compared for the political attitudes they incite in followers (Ireland 1991) or the means they offer people to cope with and overcome poverty (Mariz 1994). If there is a conclusion to draw from these works, then it must be that the religious reality is very complex and diverse, and that people's involvement in one religion or the other depends on many factors and has many consequences for their lives.

What all the studies of this third type share is a commitment to the poor and the religious drives of these people. Objectively, base communities could be a way to improve the quality of life for large groups of Brazilians. In practice, however, things seemed to work out differently and scholars tried to understand the how and why by studying the cultural and social structure of people's lives. One important improvement was the transformation of the unspecified and uniformizing category 'the poor' into individuals and groups of individuals, all with their own life predicaments and identities. Thus we learned that CEBs in a neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro are not attractive to black people because there this Catholicism offers no oppositional discourse on the deeply rooted racism (Burdick 1993). We also learned that the differences between CEBs and Pentecostal groups may not be of importance as far as the consequences of adherence for the economic survival of the poor is concerned (Mariz 1994).

In these studies, the CEBs are compared to non-Catholic religious groups and churches. However, the boundaries between Catholic and non-Catholic are not as fixed as they seem. I will return to this question in the following chapter. The emphasis on ideological contrasts also leads to an underestimation of the resemblance in lived experiences of the participants of the groups. Moreover, a consequence of the comparison of CEBs with non-Catholic groups was that different options within Catholicism received less attention. As I mentioned before, the growing Catholic Charismatic Movement received attention relatively late (Machado 1993 and 1994, Lehmann 1996, Pierucci and Prandi 1996a). Various other groups do operate in the Catholic Church and it is to be expected that this influences base communities at least as much as, for instance, Pentecostal groups do. During my fieldwork, several articles were published in the popular media attributing the decline of *basista* Catholicism to the attraction of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement.¹⁷ If the relationship did not exist before, at least it became relevant for the *basista* readers of these articles in Garanhuns.

16 Burdick (1993:7) argues that this approach is not appropriate for the Brazilian polyreligious context, because people often adhere to different religious groups, in succession and at the same time.

17 See note 15 on page 24.

TOWARDS PRACTICE

To summarize, several points of attention emerged from this discussion of the three types of literature on the topic of religious change and base communities in Brazil. The first was the incompleteness of all approaches. As I showed, many important data were presented in the literature. The institutional paradigm draws attention to the connection between social structural constraints, ideological changes and the development of the religious institution. Social movement theory of the politics paradigm emphasizes the multiplicity of relations between different domains of life and cultural politics. It draws attention to the process of mediation and the complexity of the cultural embeddedness of the religious. The culture paradigm addresses the very important relationship between the various religious options in Brazilian society and the cultural aspects of the lives of poor Brazilians. However, the focus on one aspect or the other also created blind spots.

Secondly, notwithstanding the differences between these three forms of analysis, they shared some similarities that must become points of attention for the present analysis. The first of these is that scholars often assume an almost direct relationship between changes in the ideology on the one hand and the social practice and consciousness of the people on the other. The second characteristic the three approaches have in common is that the mediation of cultural forms is treated as an activity of elites. The third affinity of the three paradigms discussed is that the religious properties of liberationist Catholicism received little attention, in favour of political and institutional features.

To be able to address all these points of attention, some kind of an overarching framework is needed in order to be able to understand the religious practices and meanings resulting from twenty years of liberationist Catholicism. Such an approach must both establish the interconnection between the institutional, the political and the religious, and evaluate the roles played by all actors involved in the process of the construction of religious meanings and practices. It also must avoid this somewhat simplistic, direct translation from ideology to social practice, and instead offer insight into the structural and cultural construction of both ideology and practice. I seek to realize the complementarity of the different approaches through a practice approach. Developments in practice approach promise to avoid the foregoing pitfalls and omissions, because the different aspects focussed on in the separate types of studies are connected in a systematic way. In the following section, I will explain how I plan to apply my approach in the research on the Catholic community in Garanhuns.

2.3 Catholic campaigning and religious change

My adoption of practice approach is meant to resolve the consequences of some flaws of previous analyses. To cover the complex construction of religious meaning, we need a broad approach, one which pays attention to institutional, political and local aspects and to the interconnections between these different focuses. We need to understand the meanings the actors attach to the liberationist discourse and how they give shape to this specific religious practice. In this section, I will extend the argument by addressing the three similarities I deduced from the three types of analysis of religious change in Brazil in the previous section.

AGENCY AND PUBLIC IDEOLOGY

The first point was the lack of a model of processes at work within the relationship between ideological changes and social structure. For reasons of clarity, it will be useful to rephrase the central problem of this book. Brazil was and still is a predominantly Catholic country. During the past few decades, a totally different and new interpretation and ritual practice was introduced, initiated by a new theology disseminated by agents of the institution. Thus identifiable actors introduced a new and different version of Catholic belief and ritual. It was an intentional campaign to change the form and content of Catholicism in Brazil, including not only its relation to society and state, as many students of Brazilian Catholicism pointed out, but also its relation with the faithful. Ortner (1989b:200) introduces the expression 'cultural politics' for this type of activities of religious agents. Cultural politics are the politics of the public ideology, or as Ortner defines it "the struggles over official symbolic representations of reality that shall prevail in a given social order at a given time." In cultural politics, the control of truth and value are at stake.

For general usage, these "official symbolic representations of reality" may seem a somewhat vague notion, but in the context of religion it is an exceptionally well-suited description of the goals and aims of religious specialists. Catholicism is a religion that strives for an ideological hegemony that reaches all spheres of society. In this context, the ideology comes in the form of a doctrine that is spread through discourse and ritual, symbolic and organizational rules and goes on. Specific actions to change the public ideology can be seen as cultural campaigns, promoted by interested parties. Liberationist Catholicism as pursued by liberationist intellectuals and clergy is one such campaign to transform Brazilian Catholicism and even Brazilian society and culture. Two aspects deserve a closer look: the process of mediation in the campaign and the role of the actors in this process.

Concerning the actors, we can make a distinction between those that initiate a campaign and those who are the 'targets' of the process of cultural transformation. Not all actors are equally fit to carry out a campaign. Ortner says (1989b:200) that identifying specific groups is possible "whose job it is to formulate and defend the definitions of reality prevalent at the time." In many societies, the religious specialists are one such group, although not the only one. Different campaigns may run simultaneously, promoted by different groups of people. In the case of liberationist Catholicism, the promoters of this view were many, and included sociologists, theologians, clergy and lay activists, holding different interpretations and visions of liberation, such as the view of the *basistas*. Moreover, the part played by the actors who are the 'targets' of the campaign can take many forms, due to both structural constraints and opportunities and the subjectivity of the actor. Therefore, the context of receptivity (Ortner 1989b:208) is as important for the outcome of the process as the contents of the campaign itself. Furthermore, an intentional campaign of one group may prove meaningful in different senses for other groups. Meanings are never fixed because they are situated and open to reinterpretation. This way, intentional cultural politics may have unintended consequences.¹⁸ This also infers other actors are not powerless in the face of the cultural politics of the clergy.

18 Some authors maintain that all cultural change is a form of failed reproduction (see Sahlins 1981).

The essential part of any campaign for cultural change is therefore the mediation of cultural forms by the actors. It is exactly this process of mediation of (new) cultural elements that creates and recreates culture.¹⁹ The question then becomes how the people react to the new religious ideas. What do they do with them: decline them, or appropriate them - or perhaps something in between? Whatever their reaction, the social and cultural order always moderates it. This order limits the possible reactions and makes some reactions more logical or inevitable than others. The Sherpa case described by Ortner (1989a) will nicely illustrate my argument.

In *High Religion*, Ortner explores the founding of celibate Buddhist monasteries among the Sherpas of Nepal at the beginning of the twentieth century. Before the arrival of the monks, the Buddhism of the Sherpas was organized by lay lamas. In her explanation of this major religious change, Ortner connects it to wider economic, social and political changes in Sherpa society and uncovers the relationship of the changes to the social and symbolic order of Sherpa culture. This enables her to show how the founding of the monasteries was both a consequence of the cultural politics of monastic Buddhists penetrating the region, and of social and cultural circumstances in the region itself. Together these formed a context of receptivity that made the shift from lay lamas to monastic religious specialists meaningful and structurally logical for the Sherpa actors at the beginning of this century. The structural logic of the changes was, however, different for different groups of actors.

For the elite, the founding of the monasteries was a way to legitimate their privileged position in society - a position that was becoming less strong, because economic and social changes were offering opportunities for social ascent to other groups in society. For the ordinary people, the hegemonic order offered new opportunities and their contribution to the founding of the monasteries was a claim (in traditional cultural terms) for recognition as respectable participants in society. A third group comprising the sons and daughters of the elite who, because of inheritance rules and the ruling family status order, were in danger of losing their elite position, gave yet another meaning to the monasteries. They became monks and nuns, which allowed them to gain respect and a high status in moral terms without having this import on the secular scales of status and power (Ortner 1989a:175). All these actors were confronted with structurally conditioned problems, and all found in monastic Buddhism a meaningful response to these problems. However, everyone mediated the new, external forces in their own way.

Similarly, the relation between ideological changes in the institutional Church can never be translated directly to the religious practice and meaning-making of the laity in Brazilian parishes. This becomes even more clear when we explore the nature of cultural politics.

The ultimate goal of any campaign of cultural politics is to change the thoughts, feelings and practices of the people. The monks in the Sherpa area described by Ortner started an extensive campaign to depreciate marriage, sex and family relations. One way they did this was to attack the position of the married lamas, who were still the most important religious specialists in the area. Another aspect of their cultural politics was the introduction

¹⁹ Note that the act of mediation here is not restricted to professionals the way it is in the studies of the politics paradigm I discussed earlier. I will return to this below (page 32).

of new rituals expressing the moral values of celibacy. Both practices were aimed at a fundamental change in the social and moral characteristics of the Sherpa culture.

Liberationist Catholicism in Brazil also had extensive aspirations. The ultimate goal was to exercise influence on individuals and society, through the process of *conscientização*. A different interpretation of the Bible and the doctrines of Catholicism was introduced. The new form of organizing the laity into base communities and the renewed interpretation of the gospel were ways to accomplish a social and political transformation of Church and society.

CULTURAL MEDIATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

This brings me to the second point of attention I discerned from the studies presented in this chapter: the process of mediation remained largely unexplored in all three paradigms. The works I discussed paid little attention to the cultural embeddedness of the construction of the religious. However, cultural constraints and cultural opportunities influence the way the liberationist message is received and reworked, both by *basistas* and the laity. Only the works of the third group I distinguished, with its departure from the religious marketplace at a local level, and some recent work on social movements (in the politics paradigm), to some extent paid attention to the context of receptivity. This is a necessary step in order to create insights into the processes of collective and individual meaning-making and social action related to the religious dimension of daily life.

In this book, I use the word mediation to draw attention to the interconnection between structure and agency. As I perceive it, mediation refers to the process of interpretation and adaptation of cultural elements. This includes appropriation of one's own use and the conveyance to others. It also includes rejection and transformation, as well as the endeavours to change the structural conditions of the culture. Thus, cultural mediation includes the interpretation and reinterpretation of discourse, symbol, ritual and action by the actors, as well as the cultural, social and structural factors that situate this interpretation and reinterpretation (cf. Ortner 1989a:17). This meaning of mediation broadens the concept to include practice. I therefore must go deeper into this.

In general usage, the word mediation points to the role of a limited group of agents, i.e. the priests, nuns and other representatives of religious institutions. In the context of religious campaigns such as the liberationist Catholic campaign under study here, they are the agents that "provide structured access to resources, valued alliances, and senses of legitimacy" (Levine 1992:335). As I mentioned (page 26), the studies focussed on the political aspects of liberationist Catholicism, privileging the role of mediators in the processes of political change. Their authors underscore that the *basistas* are more than just middlemen who transmit the ideology from 'above' to 'below'. They also bring in their own personalities, understandings and wishes. In the process, they might change their opinions, preferences and skills.

Levine (1992:335-7) discerns three central aspects of the 'predispositions' of mediators that are important for their role in religious campaigns. First, gender seems to play a significant part. Second, the personal tastes and the commitment of the mediators are important. Can the mediators bridge the gap between themselves and the laity with whom they are working? Third, the linkages of the *basistas* with their institutions, diocesan or regular superiors, political parties or social movements may have an impact on their role

as mediators. It goes without saying that a research concerned with religious change must pay attention to these dynamic aspects of mediation.

However, as I understand it, the activity of mediation is not limited to *basistas* or clergy. The laity are also involved in expressing and reworking the religious images and values. They are also giving meanings and are fulfilling tasks they believe are important and relevant to their personal lives and the lives of the other members of their community, and for their religion for that matter. In doing so, they are also 'predisposed' or constrained and motivated by cultural, institutional and structural factors, just as the *basistas* and clergy are. In short, they are mediators of religious meaning and legitimacy as well.

Apart from drawing attention to the interconnection between structure and agency, the word mediation also emphasizes the dynamic and processual character of cultural change. Of course, culture always involves mediation. In this particular context of a religious campaign it concerns especially the mediation of the liberationist Catholic doctrine, and the practice of organization and ritual.²⁰

To be able to grasp the sources of the ways in which cultural politics accomplish changes, Ortner (1989b) introduces a distinction between ideology and consciousness. Ideology stands for a public symbolic order that is subject to public debate and intentional revision. The concept of consciousness refers to "a more tacit order of assumptions and structures of feeling that actors bring to their social life" (Ortner 1989b:200), i.e. the subjectivity of the actor. Together, these form culture. "Obviously there are complex relations between the two orders of culture: ideology is ordered by the assumptions of consciousness and vice versa, and the distinction is difficult to make and probably harder to maintain." (Ortner 1989b:200). For the analysis, however, it is enlightening to use this distinction between ideology and consciousness as a descriptive device. As I understand it, the connection between them lies in the process of cultural mediation. The emphasis on receptivity and mediation helps to avoid the pitfall of assuming a direct line between public ideology and the actor.

Although it has been criticized (Kamsteeg 1995:29),²¹ Ortner's choice for the term consciousness is especially interesting for my argument, because in the case of liberationist Catholicism this explicitly and literally was part of the campaign in the project of *conscientização*. The core of the project of the Church of the poor is the aim of raising the consciousness of the poor. Liberationists applied this phrase to their approach, which promoted reading the Bible 'from the perspective of those who read it'. In combination with the preferential option for the poor, the audience addressed here comprised the workers and peasants of the country. The rhetoric of liberationist Catholicism emphasizes knowledge and rationality as necessary tools for shaping an idea of societal progress and individual responsibility in the project of the creation of God's Kingdom on earth. An important aspect of the study of base communities and their meaning in contemporary religious and social life must therefore be the analysis of how this intended 'conscientization'

20 Thus, not all acts of mediation are relevant here, although they may include more than only the explicitly liberationist Catholic ones.

21 Kamsteeg regards the concept 'consciousness' as too cognitive and prefers to use Bourdieu's term 'habitus'. I agree with Kamsteeg that it is somewhat misleading to use consciousness for assumptions and structures that may be largely unconscious. However, habitus is not really an unambiguous concept either. Furthermore, habitus has the connotation of fixedness and unchangeableness, which makes it incongruous to the approach proposed here.

takes shape (or not) in the CEBs as religious groups and in the lives of individuals participating in these groups. After all, it is the ultimate goal of the campaign.²²

MEANINGFUL RELIGION

In order to account for the third point of attention I sorted out from the literature, an additional step must be taken. For both the institutional paradigm and the politics paradigm, I highlighted the lack of attention to the religious aspect of base communities. For instance, in the study of the political outcome of the religious organization, attention is mostly directed at the explicit political ideas, such as behaviour during elections or adherence to political parties. In other words, the result of religious behaviour holds a prominent place. However, this does not explain whether, and if so, how and why religion stimulated this behaviour. Therefore, research on the religious groups must include attention to the context in which lay people construct meaning and perform actions, and the diverse motivations behind these meanings and actions.

More important, not all motivations for religious action and behaviour can be described in political, social or economic terms. The religious may be meaningful in its own right, for instance, because it offers experiences that are not comparable to other experiences (cf. Levine 1992:17, Miguez 1997:24). The case of the Sherpas described by Ortner underscores the relative autonomy of both the public ideology and the actor's consciousness. In the process of meaning-making, the aims and meanings of the cultural politics showed a certain autonomy that made it possible for different actors to direct the modality of the changes by adding their own interests and goals to it. These interests and goals may be religious, too, or as Ortner (1989b:206) put it: people may generate projects that gain a motivating force in themselves. The religious field is an outstanding example of a field where people may generate this type of project; I therefore explicitly want to recognize religious motivation as a relatively autonomous force in the cultural process.

The attempt to take account of all of these considerations establishes the structure of this book. The endeavour to unravel the fate of liberationist cultural politics in Garanhuns is structured into two parts according to the division Ortner made between 'cultural politics' and the public religious order (Chapters 3 to 5) and 'consciousness' and the outcome of the process of mediation (Chapters 6 and 7). Of course, this division is purely for the sake of the argument, since the two parts are intrinsically intertwined.

By now I have expounded quite a lot on the liberationist ideology that formed the content of the cultural politics. The context in which the campaign was pushed forward was merely touched upon. What then is the religious context that is the scene for the liberationist campaign in Garanhuns? In the following chapters, I will describe this from two perspectives: the first is daily life in the parish (Chapter 3) and the second is historical (Chapter 4).

22 In Chapter 7, I will return to the problem of *conscientização*.

3 The day-to-day religious order in the parish

The actors in this book are the members of the lay groups in the parish of São Vicente, Garanhuns. Lay groups are an important element of Catholicism and the religious actions of the people. However, the religious realm also encompasses many other elements. In this chapter, I will present five different encounters with the religious as it is manifested in the lives of the parishioners. All cases presented here describe some of the routines and everyday practices related to the religious in the parish. In the first three cases, different Catholic rituals are discussed; in the other two, the scope is extended to the wider religious realm. This exploration introduces the social and religious order that forms the context for the process of religious change provoked by liberationist Catholicism.

The second goal of this chapter is to discuss some matters of conceptualization. The title of this book refers to a view on the religious that is shared by many in the parish of São Vicente. All that is God's is good. This phrase implies that for the speakers some things are religious while, apparently, other things are not. In some way, 'things of God' (*coisas de Deus*) can be discerned in the world. In scholarly terms: people differentiate between 'the sacred' and 'the profane'. However, the boundaries between these realms are far from clear. Nor are they the same for all actors. Although my focus on Catholic lay associations limits the field of research, it does not resolve the ambiguity of terminology. It directs the analysis to both the collective aspect of religious action and the individual intentions and meaning-making. Lay groups, such as base communities, are groups of Catholic lay people. Catholicism is a religion. However, both these concepts are less clear and univocal than they seem. Defining the phenomena of religion and Catholicism becomes important here. The problem is of more than just academic interest.

There are also practical reasons for going into the question of conceptualization. For example, the account of the *assembléia* in Chapter 1 showed that the laity and the priests involved in the practice of local Catholicism are worried about the boundary between religion and politics. *Basistas* and other advocates of liberation theology explicitly establish a link between the two, as was made clear in Chapter 2. Such observations make the question what is religious relevant to anthropologists as well, and require the establishment of conceptual boundaries. Obviously, the specific question of the relevance of politics to religion cannot be treated in isolation. It is an aspect of ideas on the nature of religion and more general understandings of what belongs to the religious and what does not. It goes without saying that different (groups of) actors have different opinions in this respect.

In studies of Brazilian religion, the most used concept in this respect is 'popular religion'. However, the meaning of this concept is often vague and undefined. It may be used in a sociological sense referring to the religion of 'the people' (Rostas and Droogers 1993), or it may be used as a political term, referring to the religion of the oppressed classes who are resisting the dominant religion or culture (Brandão 1980). The term is most commonly used to refer to something informal, unofficial, as opposed to official religion, or in this case official, clerical Catholicism. In all these usages, 'popular religion' entails the connotation of marginality. This is an important reason why I feel this characterization is not adequate for the religious reality of the people of Garanhuns. Therefore, I will not follow the convention in this book, a choice I will further explain later in this chapter.

Thus, in this chapter I will also address the problem of the conceptualization of religion. The first three cases address aspects of my argument with respect to popular religion.

In Section 3.4, these aspects will be brought together to illustrate that the concept of 'popular' (as opposed to 'official') religion has little explicative value. In Sections 3.5 and 3.6, the focus will broaden from the explicit Catholic realm to a wider context of religion. The synoptic view formed by the cases will lead to two important concluding points at the end of this chapter.

3.1 The *via sacra*

At seven in the evening, the parishioners of São Vicente were to depart on a *via sacra* from the church. It would be the first procession of the Stations of the Cross in the Lent of 1990. Even though I arrived punctually, a few dozen people had been there for some time. They were curious and studied the tall, pale, female anthropologist who was lingering, feeling a little out of place, at the back of the church, while they passed their time singing. They were there to participate in a religious act organized by their parish, and that night they would be commemorating Christ's path on the way to Calvary by walking in a procession that symbolizes the event.

People continued to arrive, and after a while the priest gave a short introductory speech about the theme of that year's *campanha da fraternidade* (brotherhood or Lenten campaign): *Mulher e homem, imagem de Deus* (Woman and Man, likeness of God).¹ Finally, at seven-fifteen, the procession set off with a police car driving slowly in front of it. The presence of these guardians of the peace was meant to indicate the importance of the event. The priest explained that he always asks the police to control the traffic - even though the paths and alleyways that the procession would be passing through were not exactly teeming with trucks and cars! Immediately behind the police car walked a man carrying a huge wooden cross; he was followed by a few others holding a banner bearing the slogan of the campaign. *Padre Milton* and *Sister Margarida* were somewhere in the middle of the procession. They were equipped with a microphone and a portable amplifier, through which they sang songs and recited prayers. Behind them, more and more inhabitants of the neighbourhood joined the procession. Most of the faithful carried in their folded hands a small wooden cross and a burning candle.

COLINA

The parish church stands on a square off the main thoroughfare of the neighbourhood. Across from the square is the *Centro Social* (Social Centre), which also houses a grammar school and a medical post. A number of small bars and shops line the square. The *via sacra* was to pass through various neighbourhoods in the urban area of São Vicente parish. The parish consists of a number of villages spread throughout a large rural area and several neighbourhoods on the edge of the city, with an estimated 30,000 inhabitants. Colina neighbourhood, with its church and social centre, constitutes the heart of this youngest of parishes in the ever-expanding city of Garanhuns.

First we visited Barra, the neighbourhood on the other side of the hill. The houses there vary from mud cabins in the back alleys to neatly painted homes along the main

¹ The CNBB selects a theme for the period between Ash Wednesday and Easter. This is called the Brotherhood Campaign. The *via sacra* described here took place in 1990. The slogan of the Brotherhood Campaign in 1991 was '*Solidários na dignidade do trabalho*' (Solidarity in the dignity of work).

path. Our first stop was at a house where the first three stations of the passion of Christ had been represented and would be contemplated. Traditionally, a *via sacra* has fourteen stations and usually each is at a different spot, but that custom had been abandoned this time in order to simplify the organization. The members of a local base community had erected a small altar in front of one of the houses. They had also prepared texts and were holding a poster, which they had produced collectively. Their performance, however, became rather lost in the bustle and babbling.

Objectively, the Stations of the Cross ritual belongs to the 'official' part of the Catholic religion. It is part and parcel of the ritual calendar of Catholicism, the priest participates in it, and it is organized according to the locally preferred lines of liberationist Catholicism, with an emphasis on the participation of lay people in the organization and integration of elements of real life (in this case, the neighbourhood) in the ritual symbolism. In the jargon of liberation theology, this is 'religion of the people'. However, large numbers of those who participated that evening did not seem to regard the delivery of the members of the base community of Barra at the altar as the most important part of this *via sacra*. Several explanations for this occurred to me. Obviously the new approach, with stations organized by lay people, was a novelty that was not approved of by everybody. Or perhaps other aspects of the *via sacra* had always been more important to these participants.

As we continued on our way to the next stop, ever more people joined the procession. Many were talking, and children ran around yelling at one another. A few women caught the eye, because they were wearing a red ribbon around their necks, indicating that they are members of the Apostleship of Prayer, one of the neighbourhood's lay groups. The other participants wore everyday dress, and their appearance was representative of the inhabitants of Colina. The importance of the ritual of the Stations of the Cross seemed to surpass class differences: the few rich families of the neighbourhood were also taking part. Even some drunks had left the bars and were swaggering along in the middle of the other faithful.

The imagery of the *via sacra* is strong. Daily life and religion are connected in the route of the procession. Colina is a poor neighbourhood, like so many in Garanhuns. It is a rather messy area, with lots of garbage in the streets and many rundown buildings. Few of the streets are paved and many are riddled with potholes. During the rainy season (from April until September) the streets turn into vast rivers that sweep along everything in their path. It is no coincidence that the main street, which is named after a local politician, is called Rua da Areia (Sand Street) by the locals. Jobs are scarce in the neighbourhood and in the rest of the city, just as they are in the surrounding countryside. Only the municipal slaughterhouse and the water company offer some employment. In 1989 the construction of a maize processing plant was begun just outside city limits and many inhabitants found temporary work at the site. Apart from these factories, there are quite a number of small (particularly car and furniture) workshops in the neighbourhood, some *vendas* (simple grocery shops) and small bars. Many people make some money at the Sunday market.

Garanhuns is the biggest city in the region, so many people from the countryside and surrounding towns and villages go there to seek work and a better future. Others chose to try their luck further afield, and travel to Recife, Maceió or some other town with more industry and trade; to many, the long journey to São Paulo still represents an ultimate step towards achieving a better existence. Emigration is made so much easier

by the fact that all the inhabitants of Monto Alto have friends or relatives in what they call 'the South' - a term that can mean the real south just as much as Recife, which is actually located 220 kilometres to the northeast. In colloquial speech, 'the South' simply seems to be a synonym for 'better places'. Many men from Garanhuns and the surrounding countryside periodically move to the industrial areas or the sugar-cane regions to make money. In this way, they earn enough to supplement the lean income from their small farms or to tide them over a period of unemployment in the local trade or industry.

The reasons for the migrations from the countryside to the city lie in the decreasing fertility of the soil (which is due to over-planting), the limited availability of new land for the growing population, the changing relationship with the landowners and the lack of any other employment in the rural zone (Clay 1983:47). The results of these processes were clear during the following stage of the *via sacra* through some of the poorest parts of the parish. This area does not even have a proper name, but is simply called the '*Área de Ocupação*' (Squatted Area).

VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

Later on, I walked for a while with a young woman called Fernanda. She was eighteen and had lived in the parish since birth. She told me that the year before, the *via sacra* had visited all the places where people had been murdered in the preceding year. "That was very impressive. There were very many people then, many more than today." Garanhuns has a high homicide rate: although official figures are not very reliable, an average of about one person in every thousand is killed each year. Local residents are extremely perturbed by crime and it is no surprise that the imagery of the previous year's *via sacra* had appealed to many. However, even without the tragic elements of victims of crime, to me the symbolism of this *via sacra* was significant enough as we headed north, passing many *baracas* (mud huts), a sure sign of the suffering of the poor.

The procession moved to the northern edge of the urban part of the parish, which had been a wasteland just fifteen years earlier, before it was occupied by the homeless. Sister Hilda walked by my side and told me all sorts of anecdotes and stories about the streets we were passing through and the people who live there:

This part of the neighbourhood is called the *Área de Ocupação*. At first the squatters built only simple cabins - even today many of them still don't have such basic facilities as running water and electricity - but soon afterwards, these first arrivals were followed by richer people, who took advantage of the situation to lay their hands on free building sites and to construct beautiful houses.²

However, most of the houses in that part of town looked awfully poor and decrepit. Sister Hilda and some other members of her order (including Sister Margarida, who was singing into the microphone in order to animate the procession) had lived in the middle of the squatted area for years, in Rua do Grilho (Cricket street). In 1976 three nuns of the congregation of Our Lady of Fátima had decided to leave the safe and convenient walls of the convent to go and 'live among the poor' and fulfil their own financial needs. This included living under the same circumstances as the poor. They bought a hut in the *favela*

² After a year and a day, squatters acquire restricted legal rights to the land (*direito de posse*) if they have built a house upon it. After five years, this is converted into *direito de usucapião* (right to usucaption). Thus, squatters may become the legal owner of the plot upon which they have built their house (Constituição 1988: Art.183). Although for some inhabitants this term had expired, the legal situation had still not been settled satisfactorily.

and started to perform community work directed at raising the consciousness of their neighbours. Some time ago, this *pequena comunidade* (small community)³ moved to a better and more central street, but still has no fridge. As well as working as a teacher at the local college of education, Sister Hilda is very active in community life, especially with the women's group of her former neighbours in the squatter area.

We reached the second stop of this *via sacra* procession, representing the fourth to the sixth stage, which was organized by the women of the *Associação das Mulheres Santa Rita*, the women's group coordinated by Sister Hilda. It was named after Sister Rita, who was one of the first nuns to live in the Rua do Grilho, but who has now returned to the Netherlands. This is the only women's group in the urban part of the parish, and is involved in quite a few activities aimed at the needs of the women in the squatted area, ranging from the distribution of *ticket de leite*⁴ to courses in reading and writing. Every two weeks, the women hold a meeting during which they discuss a variety of topics of concern, such as violence in the neighbourhood, health services and the education of their children. Although the women's group is not officially connected with the parish, quite a few women from the group also participate in their street's base community. Therefore, this second stop of the *via sacra* was at an altar erected in front of the meeting place of the association.

Next, the march descended one of the few paved roads in that part of town towards the slaughterhouse, past the school and a small square. A little later, we left the paved road and turned right, down an even steeper path which got worse all the time, and passed a slum built right on the edge of the neighbourhoods' open sewer. The wild stream of waste water descending from the higher parts had cut a channel out of the hill seven metres deep and four or five metres wide. The hovels of the poorest people perched precariously on its rim. It was pitch black, and the stench was unbearable. An old woman stumbled, but was quickly pulled to her feet by the other participants.

When we reached the foot of the hill, we crossed the highway and entered the neighbourhood known as Aparecida, the third stop of the *via sacra*. The procession, meanwhile, had swollen to many hundreds of people. Friends and acquaintances that had not seen each other for ages met and exchanged news. The base community of Aparecida had erected a beautiful altar and prepared the contemplation of this station.

It was now getting on for ten, and after another round through the neighbourhood, the procession returned to the square in front of the church, where the last stop was located. By the time we reached it, the clock had struck eleven. Almost everyone had come along to the very end. The parishioners, who had represented the last phase of Christ's passion, had no reason to complain about the attention their efforts received. Once they had finished, the whole crowd returned to the church, where the priest dissolved the procession. Some loitered in the square to chat for a while, but it was late, and soon the neighbourhood returned to a condition of profound peace.

3 One sister of the first group has left the community. Over the course of the years, several other sisters have joined and then left the group. Two of the three sisters who now form the community were among the pioneers.

4 The *ticket de leite* was part of a programme of the federal government, started in the second half of the 1980s, that distributed milk to every poor family with children.

POPULAR AND OFFICIAL

The *via sacra* is one of the most outstanding rituals of the Catholic cycle. Each year, the devout prepare themselves with much dedication for the celebration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In Brazil, *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) is the supreme moment in the Catholic year. In many Catholic countries, including Brazil, the emphasis is on the sufferings of Christ rather than on his victory over death. The parishes organize many a *via sacra* during Lent, the forty days between Ash Wednesday (the day after carnival) and Easter. In Garanhuns this happens in all parishes, mostly on Friday evenings, while in the late afternoon of Good Friday a very large *via sacra* takes place in the centre of town and is attended by all the parishes.

The participation of lay people in the *via sacra* of the parish of São Vicente was considerable. The base communities had organized all the meditations, having been invited to do so by the priest. The groups had prepared themselves throughout Lent, on the basis of teaching aids provided by a preparatory committee of the diocese. These *roteiros* (manuals) consisted mostly of excerpts from the Bible, examples from everyday practice thematically related to these, and possible themes of discussion. The texts were meant to steer and stimulate the discussions of the group, and to activate group members to become involved in a process of *conscientização*. Finally, the various groups presented the results of their meetings. The *via sacra* has been held every year for centuries, although only recently in this form.

In the context of the conceptualization of 'religion', this case highlights the problem of the opposition 'popular' versus 'official' religion. The *via sacra* is organized by the 'official' Church and comes under the jurisdiction of the parish priest. In the organization, however, the laity's input is considerable. First, the laity organizes the various stops. They do this as members of a base community or of the women's group. Does this make the ritual an official one? Secondly, the individual participants suggested quite different interpretations of the ritual in their behaviour and their explanations to me. In other words, the communal participation in the *via sacra* does not imply a uniform experiencing of this ritual, nor that the meaning of the ritual is necessarily that prescribed by Catholic doctrines or the priest for the participants. In sum, the procession of the *via sacra* is a ritual that unites the old traditional ways with the new approach, just as it brings together individuals and groups, many of whom practice Catholicism in totally different ways. If this is what we should call 'popular' Catholicism, what is 'official' Catholicism, and vice versa? I will go deeper into this discussion in the following sections.

3.2 Our Lady in the community

Although the *via sacra* was performed in the presence of the priest, most Catholic rituals in the parish are directed by lay people. In the countryside, it is very rare to have a priest at ceremonies and religious meetings. However, most villages and hamlets have one or two pious people who 'know how to pray' and organize meetings now and then, for instance, in order to recite the rosary together. This is the case in *sítio Água Limpa*.

Seventy families, comprising some five hundred people, live in *sítio Água Limpa* in houses scattered between the fields. This area to the northwest of the city is extraordinarily

arid and the intensive cultivation of agricultural crops long ago exhausted the sandy soil. The people grow cotton and maize, and some beans and sweet potatoes for home consumption. The soil is less suitable for cassava, which, when ground into flour, is an essential ingredient of every meal in northeastern Brazil. Some families keep a few head of cattle. Sometimes the eldest sons of the family work in the city, in order to supplement the family income. Although Água Limpa is located only six kilometres from Garanhuns, such basic facilities as electricity and running water are absent. Except for a small grammar school that provides education up to the fourth grade, no such public services as the telephone, medical assistance or public transport are available in the hamlet. Obviously, this hamlet has no church either.

DONA SEVERINA'S ROSARY

At six on the dot, *dona Severina* began to recite the *terço* (rosary). She had done this every day in May for decades. Her living room was spacious and contained only the bare minimum of furniture so that many people could fit inside. A portable shrine stood on the table, a few candles burning in front of it. Inside the shrine, I saw a small statue of *padre Cícero* and one of São Sebastião. We started reciting the rosary. *Dona Severina* led the prayer, beginning with the first four lines of Hail Mary.

Hail Mary, full of Grace / the Lord is with you /
Blessed art thou among women / and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.⁵

After this, the other people present say the other four together:

Holy Mary, Mother of God / pray for us sinners /
Now and in the hour of our death / Amen.⁶

This was followed by other prayers, which were less well known by me and most other attenders. At the end of the ceremony, *dona Severina* sang a song to accompany the closing of the shrine. Then, without another word, she shuffled off to another part of the house, leaving the visitors in the living room.

Dona Severina was almost ninety years old and was considered a religious expert by her neighbours because she knew many songs and prayers about *padre Cícero*. This priest, who lived in Juazeiro in the state of Ceará, reputedly performed miracles from the late years of the 19th century onwards. *Padre Cícero* is now the unofficial patron saint of all northeastern Brazil and Juazeiro continues to be the 'Capital of Faith' of the Northeast.⁷ Lovingly, his devotees speak about *meu Padim Ciço* (*meu padrinho Cícero*, my godfather Cícero). In her youth, *dona Severina* lived in Juazeiro do Norte and used to know *padre Cícero*, a fact that gives her a special status.

THE MAY ROSARY OF THE COMMUNITY

For the inhabitants of Água Limpa, the closing of *dona Severina's* small shrine was not the end of the rituals honouring the Mother of God. Together, we walked to the house of another family, where the *terço da comunidade* (rosary of the community) was to be recited. A large group of people were already present when we arrived. The owners of

5 Ave Maria, cheio de graça / o Senhor é convosco / Bendita és tu entre as mulheres / bendito é o fruto do vosso ventre, Jesus.

6 Santa Mãe, Mãe de Deus / Rogai por nós pecadores / Agora e na hora de nossa morte / Amem.

7 Also the text on a teshirt that is sold in Juazeiro do Norte.

the house had erected an altar, and João took his place at the side of the table. He opened the meeting with a story from the Bible, and then explained it to the four dozen people in the audience. Next, he read a text from the *roteiro* of the diocese, in which an 'example from practice' illustrates the biblical story. When he had finished, he asked people for their opinion about these texts and whether they recognized the situation in their own lives. A lively discussion soon developed. One woman spontaneously sang a song in the honour of the Virgin Mary, and after that somebody broke into '*I am happy in the community*' - the well-known song from liberationist liturgy⁸ - and the whole group joined in.

João, the organizer of the meeting, loves to talk about 'his' base community. He had begun to organize religious meetings in the hamlet ten years earlier. Following the advice of a priest, he had bought himself a Bible and - after reading it several times literally from cover to cover - begun to organize meetings in order to pass on to his neighbours his recently gained knowledge. To understand this, it is important to recall that before the Second Vatican Council it was uncommon for lay people to read the Bible. Only the priest had access to it and he was the only intermediary between this religious knowledge and the faithful. From the 1970s onwards, the laity were encouraged to read and interpret the Gospel themselves, and João was among those who took up this enterprise.

Apart from a few years spent in São Paulo, João has lived his entire life in Água Limpa. He grew up there, met his wife, married and raised their seven children together with her. The three oldest children now live and work in São Paulo; the others live with their parents. The girls no longer go to school, but help their parents in the fields and around the house. Now in his fifties, João dedicates much of his time to his evangelizing work, not only in his community but also beyond it.

Much has changed in the *sítio* on account of the meetings that João organizes. Because it takes almost ninety minutes to walk to Garanhuns, people used to have little contact with the Church. They did pray at home, of course, and there were always such dedicated people as *dona Severina*, who organized a *terço* in the month of May, but few religious activities of any importance took place. As Edivaldo, a man in his late fifties, told me:

We did not know what it meant to have a meeting, these things, only the rosary. We used to recite the rosary. But now a lot has changed, thanks to God. The grace of God gave us João to be our *evangelizador* and I am very happy with this.⁹

There is a meeting almost every week and, like Edivaldo, many of the inhabitants of Água Limpa never fail to attend.

João is of another generation of pious people than *dona Severina*. He is one of the religious specialists who have more recently entered the scene, as *evangelizadores* appointed by the liberationist Church. *Evangelizadores* are lay people trained for this task in courses at the level of the parish or the diocese, and who organize meetings on a regular basis in their community.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ Interview 901113-176 / sheet 9: "A gente não sabia o que era reunião, essas coisas, só *terço*. *Terço* a gente rezava. Mas agora mudou muito, graças a Deus. Pela graça de Deus, botou João para ser *evangelizador* e 'tô muito satisfeito, graças a Deus."

ONE RELIGIOUS ORDER

The activities during the month of May are problematic for the analysis and conceptualization of the religious meanings and practices. The two rosaries in *sítio Água Limpa* have a quite different nature. For example, whereas *dona Severina* limits herself to reciting old prayers, João adds the new liberationist discourse to the praises of Mother Mary, and while *dona Severina* carries out her ceremony without having any contact with the priest, João uses the *roteiro* of the diocese and attends the monthly meetings of the *evangelizadores* of the parish, which are supervised by the priest.

If we take institutional jurisdiction as a criterion, the work of *dona Severina* would fall in the category 'popular Catholicism', whereas the meetings organized by João would be part of official or erudite Catholicism. However, what does this say about the religious beliefs and experiences of the people involved? Those who attend the two meetings are largely the same people. Moreover, the participants seem to feel no problem with nor contradiction in this. João himself likes to participate in the rosary of *dona Severina*. Besides, the fact that João receives 'official' approval in contrast to the work of *dona Severina* does not necessarily show in the meetings.

What is more, from a historical perspective, the devotion to Mary is more related to the lifetime of *dona Severina* than to contemporary Catholicism. Marian devotion was propagated in Brazil during an earlier reformist campaign (the ultramontane campaign, see Chapter 4). At that time, the exercise carried out by *dona Severina* would have been 'official'. A similar observation on the Hail Mary in Ireland inspired Taylor (1995:199) to speak of an "ironic dialectic between Church and popular piety."

The case of the two rosaries suggests that Catholicism - be it called official, popular or some other name - concerns something other than, or not merely, specific religious significations. What has changed since João started his meetings is the amount of communal religious activity in the hamlet. In conversations with several members of the community, it was this increase of religious occasions that they all underscored rather than the specific liberationist message João brings to them or the fact that the *evangelizador* might be seen as an official representative of the priest or parish. Religion is more about 'doing' - going to meetings, praying together - than 'believing' one interpretation of the Bible rather than another. This is also suggested by the next case.

3.3 The godfather

Sítio Brejo dos Santos is another rural community. I visited Olívia, the leader of its base community. While I was there, other visitors arrived: a young woman called Márcia with her three small children, the youngest of which was still a baby. They were dressed in their Sunday best. First, we exchanged polite conversation, each asking after the health of the other's family. Then Márcia asked Olívia when the next *curso de padrinhos* (course for godparents) would take place.

This *curso* is a compulsory course to prepare parents and godparents who want a child to be baptized. It is organized by local lay people on behalf of the parish. Like the *evangelizadores*, these lay people receive instruction from the priest or specialized lay agents. The course consists of three meetings during which the principal teachings of

the Catholic Church regarding baptism are explained. After the last meeting, each participant receives a certificate of participation which he or she can show the priest during the baptismal ceremony. In rural communities, these are held once or twice a year; in towns, however, they are more frequent. Usually several children are baptized at the same time. In the policy of the diocese, the importance of the sacrament of baptism for believers is an opportunity - one seized with both hands - to transmit liberationist teachings.

COMMUNITY

In turn, the parishioners regard baptism as an important ritual. Much time, money and effort are spent on these christening feasts. There are usually four godparents: two women and two men. The dresses of the children who are to be baptized are beautiful, and the parents dress up in their best clothes. After the religious part, there is a party, which often includes a communal meal, drinks and snacks. Many people use such occasions to visit relatives who live far away. It was this celebration that Márcia had in mind. She was having a problem with the Church's requirement to follow the *curso de padrinhos*. She explained that she would like to have her youngest child baptized, but that the godfather she had chosen had not taken the course and was refusing to do so.

There was some further chatter, which I did not understand well because I did not yet know all the people they were talking about. After half an hour, Olívia sent her seven-year-old daughter to the bedroom to fetch a little bag of *farinha de mandioca* (manioc flour). Olívia gave the bag to Márcia, who thanked her for the gift and then left.

Olívia explained that Márcia visits a considerable number of neighbourhood families each week, in order to receive food. Everybody knows that she is poor. Her husband is disabled and cannot work much. Although most of the families in Brejo dos Santos have little to spare, it comes naturally to them to share what they have with those who are even poorer and more destitute than they are. Márcia does not need to ask for this assistance: whenever she pays a visit, everyone knows what she is there for and gives her something. In Olívia's view, this also has religious significance: "Although this woman does not participate in the activities of the base community, she is still a member of the community and people must help each other."

In fact, Olívia herself has severe economic problems. She has spent most of her life living alone with her four children, because her husband, Zeca, spends most of his time working in São Paulo. Shortly after their marriage, Olívia tried living there but felt very unhappy and returned home. Since then, Zeca has worked in São Paulo and comes home only occasionally. Olívia raised their four children practically alone. Compared to Márcia, however, Olívia and her family are better off because they grow their own food and Zeca sends them money.

RITUAL KINSHIP

Olívia then explained that Márcia's poverty accounts for her eagerness to know about the *curso de padrinhos*. Márcia had chosen the mayor of Caetés - the municipality to which Brejo dos Santos belongs - as godfather for her child. By doing so, she would be establishing a bond of ritual kinship with a rich and powerful person in the community. According to local tradition and Catholic doctrine, the mayor would then be obliged to support the child, for instance by paying for its education. Thus, religion is not limited

to the relationship with the divine: inter-human relationships can also contain a religious basis or significance.

However, because the mayor was refusing to take the course, the child could not be baptized in the parish where she lived, for the priest was insisting that this obligation be met. In other parishes priests sometimes show some leniency, but because of the distances involved it was difficult to find out when and where the next christening ceremony was to take place. Furthermore, the journey to such a place would inevitably increase costs. The organization of the baptism seemed to have reached a deadlock.

In liberationist Catholicism as preached by *padre* Milton, baptism is considered an important ritual. It is the first step towards becoming a practising Catholic. It means becoming part of the community of believers and makes the parents and godparents co-responsible for the religious education of the child. In the religious practice of Márcia and many others, baptism is also important because of its social consequences. It creates kinship ties far beyond blood-lines and thus establishes bonds between individuals living in a locality or community. Godchildren always address their godparents as *padrinho* or *madrinha*. Confirmation and marriage also require witnesses who become godparents. A person thus may have five or more godparents, and be a godparent to many others. Furthermore, a godparent addresses the child's parents as *compadre* or *comadre*. In return, the parents address the godparents as *compadre* or *comadre*, too. These ritual kinship ties are important in the social organization in Garanhuns. In this way, everybody knows who is related to whom and people use these terms when explaining relationships between individuals and families. The idiom of godparenthood is also extended to secular life-cycle rituals, such as school graduations. Graduates choose a *padrinho* who stands at their side when they receive their diploma.

Thus, the motivations of the actors are quite different. To label the first meaning of the baptism ritual 'official' and the second 'popular' would make the latter a derivative of the former. In the next section, I will pull together the evidence of the three cases discussed so far.

3.4 Revising oppositions

The *via sacra*, the rosary for Our Lady, baptism and other sacraments are all part of the currently promoted version of Catholic beliefs. However, the fact that these are rituals related to the parish does not mean that all participants attach the same meaning to these rituals and doctrinal teachings. Nor are these religious practices easily organized in terms of the opposition official-popular. The religious practices described in the previous sections cannot be considered fully official or fully popular. They are not totally informal, nor is there an indication of resistance. As I said (page 35), the many meanings attached to 'popular' in the literature have their own problems. The more general description 'of the people' serves to a certain extent, but 'the people' obviously also give weight to aspects of the official doctrine, as shown by the importance of the sacraments, participation in the *via sacra* and celebrations of the month of May in Água Limpa. At the same time we saw that, although the 'official' has considerable influence (for instance, through courses related to the sacraments), it would be wrong to evaluate the content of the religious solely by way of this aspect of it. Perhaps the only meaning of 'popular' that makes sense

is when we privilege the production of the religious meanings and rituals. Then 'popular' would underscore the fact that the laity, or the 'common people', are the producers of religion (cf. Rostas and Droogers 1993). However, the question is to what extent, under which circumstances and how.

In studying religious practices like those described here, such dichotomies as popular-official are thus not very useful. The gap between popular and official suggested by the terms does not seem to exist in reality. Rather, both parts of the spectrum contain elements of the other. The Catholic beliefs and practices of 'the people' are as much formed by Church-related teachings as by cultural characteristics related to their daily life. Neither one nor the other can be considered determining.¹⁰ I will return to this in a moment, but first I want to touch upon my additional reasons for repudiating the use of the popular-official dichotomy.

This type of binary thinking has a much more drastic effect on the anthropological representation of reality.¹¹ Dichotomies not only denote difference but also imply hierarchy. As Queiroz (1983:91) concluded, the dualism is not based on precise definitions but on value judgements. This means dichotomies are not neutral and their application has serious implications for any analysis. One side of the opposition is always privileged over the other, and may become the norm of which the other side is a derivation or a bad copy. In the case of popular-official, the former is treated as being a partial reproduction of the latter, or - contrary to this - as being a form of genuine, traditional religion, expressing the real popular culture. Practice approaches are opposed to paired analytical oppositions, because of the inherent notion of domination of one half over the other (Collier and Yanagisako 1989:29).¹² If we are interested in the processes of the workings of culture and social life, we cannot allow ourselves to employ categories that exclude certain actors in the field. For example, the laity may be as productive as the clergy. Furthermore, binary thinking often results in essentialist thinking. Although we always say that both poles are only ideal types and we only use them for analytical purposes, more often than not our constructions take their own course and create their own reality.

Accepting the multiple and differentiated processes at work in the construction of Catholic beliefs and practices poses the question what motivates these processes, in terms of both individual choices¹³ and societal preconditions, and is therefore very relevant to the theme of this book. However, before we engage in this analysis, an idea of the religious order is needed in order to contextualize the making of this Catholicism. Until now, the cases illustrated Catholic rituals and beliefs. We saw that there are many ways to be a Catholic (cf. Brandão 1985a) and that this Catholicism contains more than merely a notional assent to religious content spread by the clergy (cf. Ireland 1984:90). Examples are the *Avé Marias* of an autonomous agent such as Severina, and the social consequences

10 The same conclusion was reached in the discussions on popular culture. As Salman (1993:113) put it: any subculture is permeated with elements of others and shares characteristics with other cultures within a social constellation.

11 As Ortner (1995:371) stated: "While it is always 'sort of right' it is nonetheless dangerously misleading."

12 Elsewhere Jacobs and I (1996) have shown that the use of all kinds of variations on the domestic-public dichotomy seriously hampers the study of religion.

13 One alternative offered in literature is that people pick and chose what is of use to them from the whole spectrum of available options in the religious field.

of godparenthood for the family of Márcia. Nevertheless, all these meanings and practices can be considered as being linked to Catholic doctrine and teachings, be it sometimes in a loose way. So much for the boundaries between society or culture and religion.

To add to the complexity, the religious also includes other currents - elements of the belief system that are less clearly connected to (contemporary) Catholic doctrine. I will now discuss two of these more extensively, as examples of the complex ways in which the religious is produced and reproduced. The first is the case of the belief in wandering souls and other forms of spiritual intervention in everyday life. In this case the connection with Catholic beliefs seems to be very loose. In the second case, I will present a traditional example of so-called popular religion: a pilgrimage place near Garanhuns. Using these examples, the next two sections will explore the conceptualization of 'Catholicism' and 'religion'. In other words, what about the boundaries between 'religion' and 'Catholicism'? The two cases also provide further challenges to the opposition between popular and official.

3.5 Wandering souls

Marina was eight years old. She is the oldest daughter of Maria and Antonio, and has two brothers and a sister. One day she visited the priest together with her mother. Throughout the conversation she remained very silent - unlike her mother, who nervously began to talk about the goblins who pester her daughter. "Marina is *assombrada*," she said. "She doesn't sleep anymore, she shrieks all night, says nasty things to me and weeps non-stop." Marina was also refusing to help her mother in the house. The girl had an explanation for it: it was the spirit of her late mother-in-law, who had always hated her because she is so black, while her son is white.¹⁴ Marina resembles her grandmother, Maria's mother-in-law, in both looks and character.

Marina's behaviour had so disrupted family life that Maria had decided that something must be done about it. She had already consulted with neighbours and family, and had taken Marina to a *catimbozeiro*.¹⁵ Following the counsel of these people, Marina had not been to school for a few months. However, her behaviour had not improved and Maria was at her wits' end, also because she had no money for further consultations with faith-healers. She had come to the priest's house to tell her story and ask for help. Perhaps he could exorcize the spirit.

EVIL SPIRITS

I had only recently moved into the neighbourhood when I witnessed this encounter. Father Milton had invited me for dinner, and just as we were about to sit down at the table, Maria and Marina came in. Since Maria did not yet know me, Father Milton introduced us, presenting me as *doutora*, a title that can refer to a medical doctor, but also to any person who can read and write, who holds an 'important' office (i.e. does no menial labour) or

14 Maria said: "*Sou uma nêga preta e ele é branco*", which literally means "I am a black Negro woman and he is white". Later, when I got to know Maria better, I often heard her mention the colour of her skin as something related to her troubles and poverty. Although Brazil has the reputation of being a racial democracy, racism is widespread.

15 A *catimbozeiro* is a practitioner of *catimbó*, a sort of black magic associated with Afro-Brazilian religious practices.

who derives status from possessions. Thus, promoted to expert for vague reasons, I was called upon to help solve the problem.

The attention of two such intellectual giants as us worked miracles. Maria gratefully listened to some nutritional advice. Although Father Milton did not say so to Maria's face, he instantly recognized the true causes of the problem: Marina and the other children suffered from malnutrition, and Maria projected her own mental problems onto her daughter. While joking around, he asked for further details and tried to discover more background information about the family situation. Meanwhile, he peeled oranges and gave them to Marina.

It turned out that Maria had recently given birth to another baby, and had been sterilized immediately afterwards.¹⁶ Father Milton suggested that this operation might have put her somewhat off-balance. Being the oldest child, Marina must have seen her position in the family change after the arrival of the newborn baby, if only because there was now considerably more work to do. Furthermore, the seven-member family had to get by on a single minimum wage (*salário mínimo*), which in these times of economic crisis most certainly was not sufficient to guarantee adequate nourishment and hygiene. Besides, even when there is no economic crisis a *salário mínimo* is not enough to support a family or even an individual. Perhaps this is best explained by the fact that income is measured in numbers of salaries. The government sets the size of the minimum salary. Nationally, the mean number of salaries between 1981 and 1990 was 4.9 (Oliveira 1993:29). Generally five salaries are taken as the amount needed to live above the poverty line. However, in the Northeast very few people earn so much money.

Such explanations, however, were not satisfactory to Maria's mind. She had come for a concrete and tangible solution to the problem, and counsels of better nourishment and supervision of her children, as the priest proposed, were simply not good enough. In her view, the spirit of her mother-in-law was the real cause of her daughter's deviant behaviour, and therefore the only acceptable solution was to exorcise the evil spirit.¹⁷ Although on rare occasions the priest did practice exorcism, he now merely proposed saying a few Masses for the soul of the deceased mother-in-law. Usually people pay for the dedication of a Mass for the benefit of a deceased, but in this case the priest would not charge.

MORE SPIRITS

The story of Marina and her mother provides us with a glimpse into the ideas and opinions about the relationship with the supernatural and the role of religion in people's everyday life. Maria considers herself a Catholic. She got married in church, her children had been baptized and she regularly attends Sunday Mass. However, in her eyes, the wandering spirit of her mother-in-law was also a reality, although this does not fit in with the doctrines of currently advocated Catholicism. As soon as Maria had left Father Milton's house that

16 In Brazil, it is common for women to be sterilized, often involuntary. Usually the operation takes place while they are in a hospital to give birth. According to statistics from UNICEF and the Brazilian Ministry of Health, female sterilization is the main method of 'anti-conception' in Pernambuco (64.1% of women who use 'birth-control' do so through sterilization) (Istoé 1991a).

17 Had Marina been an adult, a probable explanation would have been *nervos*, defined by Nancy Scheper-Hughes as a "state or condition of extreme nervousness; common and potentially fatal psychosomatic folk syndrome" (1992:563).

evening, he told me he did not believe the woman's explanation, but that he was aware that saying a Mass for Maria's mother-in-law would be an adequate solution. By saying such a Mass, he would be acting in a way that was acceptable to the Catholic Church, despite the fact that these kinds of phenomena are no longer a part of contemporary Catholic doctrine or liberationist Catholicism.

The term *assombrada* (literally: darkened, clouded, be-shadowed) is often used in everyday speech. Many causes can bring about doom or torment, of which the evil eye (*mau olhado*) and suffering souls (*almas penadas*) are the most frequently met. Especially older people told me stories about ghosts, in which the adventures of the *almas penadas* were foremost. *Almas penadas* are the spirits of the deceased that try to take possession of a living person because they have not yet fulfilled their task on earth, or because they still have to pay for their sins. Such an attack often takes the shape of a nervous breakdown accompanied by goose pimples (cf. Monteiro 1985:79), as with Marina, or the spirits appear in the dreams of their next of kin.

One woman, for instance, told me the tale of her neighbour, who, a short while after his demise, appeared to his wife in a dream with the message "Have ten, fifteen, twenty Masses read for me, for I am completely lost here". That very day, his wife ordered five Masses to be said for his soul. They were said, and the ghost never appeared. Another story concerned a woman whose husband appeared in a dream, some two months after his death, and told her to go to the city where he had been working (and where he had also unexpectedly died) to settle an outstanding debt of his. She heeded the request, and thus opened the path along which her late husband could return to the hereafter.

Dona Cecília described her beliefs about spirits thus: "I don't believe you can talk to them for fifteen minutes or that they come when they wish, but I do believe that they can let you know when something is lacking for their salvation in the afterlife." Seen in the context of these beliefs, the priest's solution for Marina's problems was obvious and adequate: he offered the accepted, Catholic solution.

The intruding spirits are not always those of people one used to know. One of the first things my seventeen-year-old maid, Luzia, asked after she moved in, was whether any people had died in the house. Although death is close in this society where violence produces many victims and the health service fails to save many others, the dead often cause problems for the living, especially if they have died under suspicious circumstances. Places where people have come to an unnatural end remain doomed for generations. For instance, a man travelling on a *carro de boi* (ox cart) had been killed on the road to a nearby town. Ever since then, an ox cart had been travelling up and down the road; although invisible, one could hear the lugubrious shrieking of its wooden axle. Later on, a few pious people from the vicinity built a chapel on the spot, to house the wandering soul.¹⁸

Another creature that invokes much respect is the *lobisomem* (werewolf). Luzia had a great fear of it. A person becomes a werewolf if he or she disrespects his or her parents and these then cast a curse (Monteiro (1985:81). A *lobisomem* lives in the countryside and may attack persons, eating a piece of or even killing them. Saying Catholic prayers

18 Information from *Seu José*, who raised the chapel together with his wife *dona Quitéria*.

may keep the *lobisomem* away (Monteiro 1985:79).¹⁹ This story has a moral to it, as it warns children to beware of the power of their parents.

All these instances illustrate beliefs that relate human life to the world of supernatural beings, and therefore belong to the religious according to most definitions of religion.²⁰ However, strictly speaking the belief in, for instance, wandering souls is not a part of contemporary Catholicism. Nevertheless, for many Catholics it is a part of their religious experience. Whereas application of the opposition popular-official would label these beliefs 'popular', no such contradiction or distinction can be made from the believers' point of view. Furthermore, these ideas and beliefs regarding the supernatural cannot be considered mere relics from a distant past. On the contrary, just as in the *via sacra* or the rosary, new elements are constantly introduced and adopted. The following story may illustrate this. A lambada contest was organized in a certain town in Pernambuco. A few minutes before the contest was to start, an unknown, well-groomed couple entered the ballroom. They danced extremely well, but after a while spectators noticed that the couple's nails were starting to grow, and later fire sprang from their eyes. Afterwards, a heap of clothes drenched in blood was found. It was clear: the lambada is a dance of the devil!

Although this story was not taken seriously by all my informants, I think these kinds of belief must be included in our concept of religion because they are also expressed in religious terms. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of my point is the fact that Maria went to the priest with her problem, and recounted without hesitation both her own diagnosis and her previous visits to a non-Catholic religious specialist.

After our meeting in the priest's house, Marina became almost a part of the family at my home. She never mentioned the ghost-induced torments that her mother had ascribed to her. Although she was still depressed at times, from her stories one could conclude that this was because her mother was angry with her for not performing the duties she had been assigned. Maria, by the way, also stopped by my house without any qualms if there were problems in the family.

3.6 Vows

On my return from a few weeks' holiday, I saw Maria pass by in the street, dressed completely in black. My heart missed a beat. Just before I had left town, her youngest child had been admitted to the hospital to be treated for malnutrition and dehydration. Was this why she was wearing mourning clothes? I did not have to wait long for an explanation. Happily enough, the baby had been cured and had returned home. "*Graças a Deus e Santa Quitéria*" ("Thanks to God and Santa Quitéria"), Maria said. That was why she was wearing black: when the little boy had been so sick, she had made a vow to Santa Quitéria that if he got better, she would wear black for a year. Only then would she wear

19 Since the *lobisomem* is a human being, killing it is a crime. Monteiro did research in a rural community near Garanhuns in the 1970s and relates that the fear for the *lobisomem* was so great that children stopped going to school after a story arose about a *lobisomem* near the school (Monteiro 1985:41). In the end, the school was closed down.

20 A categorization that brings with it several problems, however. See Klass 1995 for a nice critique of the anthropological creation of the supernatural.

any colour, and would return the black dress to Freixeiras, the place of pilgrimage of Santa Quitéria.²¹

PROMISES TO THE SAINTS

This brings us to another important aspect of religious customs: the making of vows (*promessas*) or, in a more general sense, the establishment of a direct relationship with the saints, and through the saints with God. The saint may be addressed directly by the faithful and can be asked for favours when personal problems strike. In exchange for the favour, the faithful promise to perform some sort of sacrifice. In Portuguese, the expression for this is *pagar promessa* (paying the promise). They will only perform this sacrifice once the saint has fulfilled the request. The favours that the saint grants are miracles in the eyes of the faithful. The most important aspect of the veneration of a saint is his or her power to perform miracles. Such miracles do not usually materialize in the saint's place of pilgrimage, but in people's everyday life, for instance when a sick person is cured or when an unemployed person finds a job.

On the whole, people love to talk about the favour they need and the vow they have made in order to receive it. From a minor investigation at the nearby shrine of Santa Quitéria, it was discovered that the majority of vows are made in order to solve health problems (Mariz and De Theije 1991:50-51).²² Especially the poor rural population lacks proper medical services and as a result turns to religious means for cures and recovery. The Brazilian health system is exclusive, and for the poor access is limited (cf. Chauí 1986:82). Consultations and remedies are extremely expensive. Furthermore, poor people are badly treated. I once went to the hospital with two very sick children and their mother. The children had a high fever, trembled, had not eaten for several days and had a nasty cough. After waiting for a long time in a corridor, a doctor finally appeared. She yelled at the children because they were not quick enough to undress, and in the ten minutes we spent in her office, she smoked two cigarettes. Money problems also induce people to make a vow to Santa Quitéria. Some ask for help in finding a job, others for a house. People also ask saintly assistance for a variety of personal problems.

In order to fulfill a vow, it is usually necessary to visit the shrine dedicated to the saint. There, often an *ex-voto* is left behind, for instance a photograph or statue, or a wax replica of the healed body part. On rare occasions, a grateful pilgrim may donate money. There are also pilgrims who come wearing a shroud, which they leave behind in the shrine. Like the wearing and shedding of black clothing - the colour of mourning - this symbolizes resurrection and new life offered by the saint. Maria could not afford to leave clothes behind, but at the end of the year she would return the dress that the janitors of the shrine had lent her. Other common ways of fulfilling a vow include letting off fireworks bought on the spot and the burning of candles.

21 She had only one black dress, which was troublesome, since it got dirty. Even this dress, however, was not her own. She had been to Freixeiras to ask the janitor of the shrine to lend her a dress so that she could fulfil her vow, a favour he granted her.

22 41 out of 50 respondents said that they had made such a vow. Half of these concerned the health of the person who made the vow, the other half concerned the health of a relative.

SANTA QUITÉRIA

Of all the saints, Santa Quitéria enjoys considerable popularity in Garanhuns. Over the course of time, she has answered many prayers and built up quite a reputation. What is more, her shrine is only twelve kilometres from town, in a hamlet called Freixeiras, which enables people to make the pilgrimage to fulfill their vow. Another saint to whom many vows are made is *padre Cícero* (see page 41). Trips to his shrine, some 600 kilometres away, are frequently organized from Garanhuns. Sometimes such a trip is made by bus, but mostly people travel on trucks, sitting on wooden benches under a piece of canvas for shelter and shade.

Everybody has his or her large and small wonders to tell. "I do not tell this to anyone, because they will say it is a lie," *dona Laura* began her story. She was in her seventies and a bad walker. She had recently visited Juazeiro, where she had twice fallen while climbing the hill to the sanctuary.²³ Bystanders had thought she was dead, because she had fallen badly. However, through the grace of Father Cícero she did not receive a scratch.

Since vows usually involve a visit to the shrine of the saint in question, the pious are not always able to perform their duties immediately. To make a journey to the shrine, they need to have sufficient money, and this often poses a problem, so that many years may pass before they have the possibility to fulfill their vow. Many vows are made, yet making a vow is no light matter. I heard many stories of people who ten or fifteen years after the saint had answered their prayers still had to fulfill their vow. The awareness of this unfulfilled obligation is a millstone around their neck. If bad luck strikes the family, it is blamed on their failure to perform their duty towards the saint. If someone dies before his or her vow has been fulfilled, someone else must take his or her place and perform the pilgrimage, otherwise the soul of the deceased will not find peace. To avoid situations like this, people might pick a vow that is easier to fulfil. Augusta from *sítio Água Limpa* had decided she had better make her vows to the saints of her home altar. Vows to saints in other places "only make work".²⁴ She made this decision after she had spent ten years owing a vow to *padre Cícero*, a situation that was very uncomfortable. The people of Garanhuns can make a vow to Santa Quitéria, whose sanctuary is easier to reach than that of *padre Cícero*. However, to many devotees the difficulties of getting to Juazeiro to fulfil a vow seem to make the saint more powerful.

The sanctuary of Santa Quitéria at Freixeiras is not an ordinary place of worship. Strictly speaking, it is an illegal site of veneration because it is not recognized by the local Church. This means that no Masses are said and there is no clerical accompaniment to the rituals performed by the pilgrims. This fact, however, seems to be of little importance to the devotees of Santa Quitéria. Most pilgrims interviewed did not even know about this (Mariz and De Theije 1991); they simply thought it was bad luck that they had never witnessed a Mass there. Most of these respondents said that they love to attend Mass and regularly do so in their place of residence, so we cannot say they are totally indifferent to it. The pilgrimage to Santa Quitéria is simply another aspect of their religious life. The same complementarity was shown by pilgrims who said they were *Kardecista* and would

23 Record 910222-234. Along this path were the fourteen Stations of the Cross. The falling of *dona Laura* therefore might have had additional meaning, although she did not mention this in her account.

24 Interview 901113-176 / sheet 23 : "Só dá trabalho."

continue their trip by visiting São José de Coroa Grande (on the Pernambucan coast) to make an offer to Iemanjá, the Sea Goddess of Xangô.²⁵ They saw no problem in combining this with veneration for Santa Quitéria.

3.7 The religious

Other examples could be added to the cases described here. In fact, one could fill a whole book with ordinary and extraordinary stories about the beliefs of the people living in São Vicente. However, it is not my purpose to give an exhaustive overview of all religious ideas, opinions and practices. To understand the influence and significance of *basista* Catholicism in Garanhuns, however, this incursion into the contemporary religious order was necessary in order to grasp the cultural context of the liberationist campaign.

The synoptic view offered in this chapter has shown that Catholicism in the parish comprises many different aspects, not all of which are in clear accordance with the Catholic dogmas and teachings. Furthermore, social and economic situations and events were shown to form an inextricable part of the beliefs and practices. Finally, the cases in this chapter challenge the idea that religion always provides a coherent world-view for its adherents. On the contrary, the field is characterized more aptly by such words as confused and scattered. The faithful might be as confused and amazed by it all as the anthropologist.

Not all actions that involve a reference to God, spirits or social life rituals are relevant to a practice approach. The name of God and the names of saints might be used in daily speech without representing or reproducing structures of thought or action. However, most occasions described here are examples of routines and everyday practices connected to structure. When the people of Água Limpa came together in the house of *dona* Severina, they were engaging in an activity with a long history connected to ideas of the relation between humans and saints, for example, ideas structured within larger cultural conceptualizations. Of these practices, some also clearly referred to questions of power and inequality, a characteristic that makes practices more interesting to the analyst. Lastly, the structure was not limited to Catholic doctrine. Instead, the practices described here are connected to a wide range of phenomena.

Therefore, two additional concluding remarks must be made, in the line of the practice approach pursued here. First, to take the religious order as encompassing both the social and the cultural, we need a broad concept of religion. In this book I will apply the terms 'the religious' and 'religious order' to refer to the broad idea of religion I have in mind.

The term 'the religious' I derive from the culture concept of Keesing (1994). Like the notion of culture, that of religion - as it is traditionally used in anthropology - implies coherence, sharedness and stability that easily lead to essentialism and reification. Keesing argues against this use of the concept of culture "as if 'a culture' was an agent that could do things, or as if 'a culture' was a collectivity of people" (1994:302). He proposes a broader idea that includes "the historical situatedness, production, and hegemonic forces of cultural meanings in terms of the internal structures and cleavages of 'society'" (Keesing 1994:309). Keesing offers the alternative to speak of 'the cultural' instead of 'the culture' in order

25 Interview 900902-Seu Divino. A *Kardecista* is a follower of Kardecism, a mediumistic religion founded by Frenchman Allan Kardec and introduced into Brazil in 1865 (Droogers 1985:15). Iemanjá is an African deity in the Afro-Brazilian Xangô. In other regions of Brazil, Xangô is called Candomblé.

to account for the multiple, subdominant and partially submerged cultural traditions within a society and to avoid reification (1994:309).

Analogous to this, I prefer to use a broad concept of religion: the religious. By this I seek to emphasize the element of human capacity, the process of creation and production and the results of these actions, rather than just a finished product of human action. Such a broad concept of religion, including all the phenomena described in the previous sections, enables me to include all kind of events and actors. It also directs the focus of analysis to the level of production, reproduction and mediation of these religious ideas and actions, both in the public symbolic order and in the everyday life of the actors.

With 'the religious order' I want to refer to the connections between various aspects of the religious. The religious order simultaneously involves political and cultural categories, values and norms, symbols and meanings, emotions and identities, and economic and social realities (cf. Ortner 1984:148-9). The religious order is not a static or necessarily coherent entity. I only use the word 'order' to refer to the relatively ordered-in arrangements, regulations, customs, morals and rules. In the reality of everyday life, all these aspects come together in a dynamic process to form the religious. It is no surprise, then, that we find difficulties in trying to establish boundaries within the cultural. Commonly, the borderline between, for instance, 'religion' and 'social relations' is not discernable. Yet more problems arise if we try to categorize different forms within the field of religion, as I have shown for 'official' and 'popular' Catholicism. Therefore, such concepts offer no analytical advantages and do not provide an insight into the description of the religious.

The second concluding point concerns the character of the religious order. In the five cases, it was shown that religious actions play an important role in everyday life. People worship, experience illness in terms of religion and establish bonds with each other in the name of religion, to give a few examples. Thus, the religious comes into being in the way men and women live their life. This observation means that the emphasis is on activities rather than on ideology (cf. Moore 1975:212-14). The cases in this chapter showed that Catholicism is mainly experience and activity: it is more about doing than believing. Thus, for many, activity and experience constitute religion more than simply symbolizing or expressing it (cf. Dubisch 1995:60). Consequently, the analysis of the religious should not be limited to the content of and consent to doctrines. Nor can the definition of Catholicism be made on the grounds of ideological statements alone.

4 Campaigns in the history of the parish

Three centuries ago, the hill at the centre of the parish of São Vicente was a refuge for runaway slaves, the *quilombo* of Colina (Cavalcanti 1983:36, Freitas 1982:72). Today a monument depicting the Cross of Christ dominates the hill, which - at 1,030 metres above sea level - is the highest point in the municipality of Garanhuns. Prefect Celso Galvão built the monument in 1954, during a period of heightened Catholic fervour. According to the town's chronicler, however, its purpose was to stimulate tourists to visit the "grandiose panorama" offered by the location (Cavalcanti 1983:354). After its inauguration, new fugitives soon crowded the path to the monument, this time landless peasants expelled from the properties of *fazendeiros* (landowners) in the rural area surrounding Garanhuns. Lately, the spot on top of the hill has been the scene for passion plays organized by a group of politically engaged young people who seek to inform and educate others through cultural projects.

During the three centuries since the first fugitives settled in the *quilombo*, many events and developments of greater and smaller importance have taken place in the town at its foot. Over time, the settlement of a few dozen inhabitants grew to a city of nearly 100,000 citizens. Four Catholic churches, each at the centre of its own parish, have superseded the small mud cabin which in its day was the first and only Catholic building. Apart from these, there are several chapels and monasteries, at least twenty Protestant and Pentecostal churches and an unknown number of temples, where the ceremonies of different Afro-Brazilian cults take place. Although it was not the only influential component in the organization of life in Garanhuns and the surrounding area, Catholicism has been an important factor in its history.

In this chapter, I will try to reconstruct the interplay of local and global forces in the historical development of the religious. This will illustrate how, through the ages, different groups of actors carried out cultural campaigns aimed at establishing specific ideologies and religious practices. These different cultural campaigns that affected local religious life, and the structural constraints and unexpected events that influenced their outcome, will be presented in chronological order. The impressions from the religious order presented in the previous chapter will acquire depth and context through the provision of this historiography.

However, one remark ought to be made beforehand. Like any history, that of Brazil - including that of Brazilian Catholicism - consists of the views and actions of the elite. Much less has been learned about the attitudes and beliefs of ordinary Catholics.¹ The private understandings of most actors remain largely unclear. Due to the nature of the sources, this chapter contains more information about the Catholicism of the ecclesiastical leadership than about the religious practices of the laity, and more about the public symbolic order than about the beliefs of the faithful. The data concerning Garanhuns were mainly taken from the (unorganized) archive of the diocese.

1 A project of CEHILA (*Centro de Estudios de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*; Commission on Historical Studies of the Church in Latin America) has produced two collections of articles of various historians and sociologists about the history of Catholicism, seen from the point of view of ordinary people (*a partir do povo*) (Hoornaert 1983a, 1983b, Beozzo 1985). However, the great scarcity of sources on the religious sentiments of laity thwarts the ideals of these authors as well.

4.1 Early organization of the religious

The colonization of the interior of Pernambuco started at the end of the 17th century. In 1532, the new colony was divided into fourteen *capitanias*, each stretching 50 *léguas* along the coast (Smith 1946:420). A *capitania* was under the authority of a *capitão-mor* (governor) who ruled the province on behalf of the government. One of his main tasks comprised the granting of pieces of land (*sesmarias*) and the founding of villages. Acceptance of a *sesmaria* came with the obligation to immediately settle and cultivate it. After two years, the colonists had to prove that they had actually tilled their land, on pain of losing their rights (Lacombe 1979:35). Although in some *capitanias* true colonization did not take place, it did in Pernambuco (Lacombe 1979:23-4). Even so, it took until the late 17th century - after the destruction of the Quilombo dos Palmares in 1696 - before the interior was peopled with colonists.²

The Capitania do Ararobá was constituted in 1699. The size of the province was some 30,000 km² and contained only a few settlements. Garanhuns, which at the time consisted of a mere fifteen houses, became the capital of the *capitania*. In the wake of the secular authorities, the ecclesiastical authorities arrived in the village. Garanhuns became a *Curado* - called the *Freguesia de Santo António do Ararobá*, and later *de Garanhuns* - with a priest of its own and a territory coinciding with that of the *capitania* (Cavalcanti 1983:137, 189). Since the priest had to administer an area many times the size of the present diocese of Garanhuns, the faithful probably had little contact with him, had little opportunity to go to Masses and limited access to the sacraments, such as communion and extreme unction. Few sources are available about this early period of Catholicism in Garanhuns. The Catholic Church in Brazil was only inadequately organized during the entire colonial and empire periods, and the Northeast was no exception. Therefore, the organization of the faith was mostly left to ordinary men and women.³

LAY ORGANIZATION

The laity established various forms of communal and organized religion in Brazil. One of these was the brotherhoods in the villages and towns; another was chapels in rural areas. A brotherhood was an association devoted to the worship of a specific saint. These associations were to a certain extent a continuation of the medieval Catholicism of the Iberian peninsula. They were mostly related to certain professional groups, like the guilds in most other countries. Once in Brazil, the Portuguese emigrants adapted the brotherhoods to the new social situation, introducing ethnicity and class as criteria for admission. As

² Palmares was the site of the Republic of run-away slaves led by the legendary King Zumbi. From here the fugitive slaves waged an extended war with the colonists in which *fazendas* and villages were attacked and plundered. See e.g. Freitas 1982. Although the exact location of this famous *quilombo* is subject to controversy, it was probably less than a hundred kilometres from Garanhuns.

³ The inadequate institutional organization of Catholicism in Brazil was the result of the *padroado* system, which made the colonization a joint venture between Church and State and gave the secular authorities responsibility for the founding of the ecclesiastical structure (Azzi 1983:160-171, 183-191, De Groot 1996:14). Bruneau (1974:16) states: "In fact, during the whole colonial period (1500-1822) it is probably misleading to talk about a Church." Religious orders were generally better organized during colonial times, but from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, the state increasingly restricted their freedom. As a result, by the time the republic was declared in 1889, hardly any religious were living in the country (Bruneau 1974:24, Fragoso 1985:200-205).

a result, some villages and towns had as many as ten or fifteen different brotherhoods. These brotherhoods organized celebrations for their patron saints, took care of the burial of their members and, where possible, built their own churches and even hospitals.⁴ The brotherhoods paid the priests to provide religious services in these churches. In this manner, the laity controlled the local religious events.

In the 18th century, Garanhuns had a brotherhood, too. A document from 1756 in the archive of Garanhuns mentions the *Confraria das Almas*, which existed in the first parish church (Cavalcanti 1983:54). Sources on the *Confraria das Almas* in Garanhuns are extremely rare, since the archives have been lost. The name of the group - the Brotherhood of Souls - suggests that one of its main functions was to bury the dead. Given the small size of the settlement in the 18th century, it is unlikely that any other brotherhood existed in Garanhuns at the time.

A second form of organized religious practice during this period of the colonization of the interior were the chapels in the countryside. Churches and chapels were constructed not only by the brotherhoods, but also by private landowners. If there was a priest, he was often also a farmer, with his own family. In places without a priest, lay people organized the religious celebrations without any clerical supervision. Beozzo (1977) argues that most inhabitants of Brazil in the colonial period lived in the countryside, and that therefore the actions of bishops and priests in the rural zone were much more decisive for the religious order.⁵ Sanctuaries and 'street chapels' were the most recognizable and collective manifestations of the religiosity of the people. The people mostly built these chapels without permission from priests or bishops. The religious practices mainly involved devotion to the saints. Feasts for patron saints were, just as with the brotherhoods, the events that structured the annual religious cycle (Queiroz 1973:85). Private families or religious individuals generally maintained the chapels (Hooimaert 1983b:292-6, 399).⁶ Over the years, many chapels became the centre of the village, and later many became the parish church (Cavalcanti 1983).

ROOTS OF A SANCTUARY

The Freixeiras sanctuary of Santa Quitéria, now an important element in the religious world of Garanhuns and its surroundings, probably originated in this period of lay organized Catholicism. The family Guilherme da Rocha, the present-day owners of the shrine, possesses a document (of unknown provenance) saying that in 1664 a Portuguese physician, Dr Benjamin Vaz Correia Rocha da Cruz Vilela, came to Brazil with his family and settled in the area. The story goes that this man was the ancestor of the Guilherme da Rocha family, and that he had the statue of Santa Quitéria in his luggage. After some time the statue started to perform miracles, and the family built the chapel in her honour. According to the owners of the place, the statue that is worshipped today by pilgrims is the original one imported three centuries ago from Portugal.⁷ The inhabitants of Freixeiras

4 One brotherhood - the *Santa Casas de Misericórdia* - even specialized in the building and maintenance of hospitals.

5 Queiroz (1973:77) uses the name 'rustic Catholicism' (*catolicismo rústico*) to emphasize the rural context in which it was embedded.

6 Besides, Brazil had a strong tradition of charismatic men and women, hermits and travelling preachers, who often had large groups of followers (Azzi 1983:240-242, Hooimaert 1983b:391-402).

7 1664 is not in keeping with the available historical records on the developments of the area around

also tell other stories concerning the establishment of the sanctuary. One story tells of a Portuguese physician who arrived in 1664 with his nine daughters, one of whom was called Quitéria.⁸ Less known versions mention the apparition of Santa Quitéria in a tree near Freixeiras, and the peasant who found the statue between coffee plants. Such themes are known from myths about other saints.⁹ We will probably never know the true source of the devotion to Santa Quitéria, but it is plausible that her veneration has a long history in Garanhuns. Without other forms of organized religious practices, the graceful statue of the saint might have taken a more central place in local religious life than it does today.¹⁰

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Freixeiras would not have been as busy as it is now, because the population grew slowly in this part of Pernambuco. In the 18th century, cattle raising was the main mode of production in the *agreste*. From the 19th century onward agriculture became more important (Andrade 1980:126). In 1855, what is now the town of Garanhuns had 156 houses (Cavalcanti 1983:139). The settlement first became a borough (*vila*) (Cavalcanti 1983:193) and in 1879 a town (*cidade*). In those days, Garanhuns was still a predominantly agrarian area.¹¹ Most inhabitants were occupied with arable farming and stock breeding. In the built-up area, the animals walked about freely on the streets. This was considered inconvenient by a growing number of inhabitants, and in 1884 the municipal authorities issued a law prohibiting stray animals in the urban area (Cavalcanti 1983:199).

The ecclesiastical facilities did not expand on an equal footing with the population. Although in the 19th century a new church was built (Cavalcanti 1983:193) and the territory of the parish had decreased as a result of the creation of new parishes, the presence of the Catholic Church was still not overwhelming. In 1872 almost 25,000 people lived there, but there were only two priests (Directoria Geral de Estatística 1872).¹² As we will see in the following section, this situation changed only at the beginning of the 20th century. The construction of a railway to the state capital, Recife, at the end of the 19th century encouraged the further development of Garanhuns. In this period, expansion into the hills around the centre of the town started and by 1898 the old *quilombo* that is now the parish of São Vicente already had twenty-five buildings (Cavalcanti 1983:213).

Garanhuns. The first *sesmaria* was issued in 1658, the second in 1671. Neither had Doutor Benjamin as its beneficiary (Cavalcanti 1983:29-30). A local historian does mention that more than a hundred years later, in 1777, a man with the same name as the contemporary owners of the sanctuary bought a *fazenda* in Freixeiras (Cavalcanti 1983:56). Around this time the name of Quitéria - which is not a very common one in Brazil - came into use in the area (cf. Cavalcanti 1983:58). To my knowledge, the authenticity of the statue in Freixeiras has never been investigated.

8 Pilgrims often tell this story, nourished by the presence of statues of the nine sisters in the museum in Freixeiras. See also O Monitor 1977.

9 Christian (1981:84-89) contends that histories on the origin of devotions often change over the course of time and become ever more similar. He warns, however, against scepticism with regard to the legends. That stereotyping occurred does not rule out that e.g. apparitions took place. Stereotyping occurred because people order their experiences in patterns they already know.

10 Furthermore, Hoornaert (1983b:398-401) maintains that the use of pilgrimage fitted well with the religious customs of the indigenous population of Brazil.

11 The census of 1872 shows that Garanhuns had 138 landowners and more than 15,000 *lavradores* (landless peasants), of whom 658 lived in slavery (Directoria Geral de Estatística 1872).

12 Although the number of priests was low throughout Brazil, the situation in Garanhuns was extreme. In the province of e.g. Rio there was one priest for every 5,115 habitants, and in São Paulo one for every 2,948 (De Groot 1996:46).

4.2 The ultramontane campaign

From the turn of the century onwards, the effects of a national ecclesiastical campaign started to be felt in Garanhuns. In Brazilian studies, this campaign is known as the Romanization (Oliveira 1985, Van den Hoogen 1990) or Ultramontane Reform (De Groot 1996). As became clear in the previous section, the authority of the Catholic Church was weak and a large part of the religious was lived outside its jurisdiction. The ultramontane campaign wanted to change this. As De Groot (1996:83) shows, the reforming clergy assumed that were the Church more present among the laity, the laity would also change their convictions and, for instance, abandon their autonomy with respect to religious feasts or their faith in healers. I will discuss three characteristic elements of this ecclesiastical campaign as it was felt in Garanhuns. First, the growing institutional presence of the Catholic Church in Garanhuns; second, the creation of new lay movements; and third, the clerical fight against 'superstition'.

CLERICAL INSTITUTION BUILDING

The ultramontane campaign was in the first place a process of reorganizing the clerical institution. Successive splits had already made the diocese of Recife and Olinda - to which, since its creation in 1676, the parish of Garanhuns has belonged - smaller and better organized. Several parishes were established over the years, taking over parts of the huge parish of Santo Antônio de Garanhuns.¹³ However, it was only from the beginning of the 20th century that the institutional presence of the Church increased with great speed. The number of dioceses at the turn of the century - seventeen - had more than tripled twenty years later - to fifty-eight - which meant a halving of the number of inhabitants per diocese. The creation of the diocese of Garanhuns in 1918 was a result of the endeavours of the institutional Church to strengthen its presence in the country, and represented an important step in the ultramontane effort to influence local Catholicism.

The first Bishop of Garanhuns, Dom João Tavares de Moura, arrived in 1919 and stayed until 1928. At the time, the diocese had fifteen parishes, served by fourteen secular and six regular priests. The disappointed new prelate recorded in the *livro do tombo*¹⁴ that there was no parochial house and that the town had only one church, the old church of Saint Anthony. Acting in the spirit of the time, he called in the help of regular orders in order to have more priests at his disposal. Within a short period, he also created three new parishes and initiated the construction of new churches.

However, it was not only the ecclesial infrastructure that received attention: the ultramontane campaign was also an ideological campaign. The reformist clergy preached a new Catholicism that indicated the Church as the only way to salvation (De Groot 1996). The means used to spread this ideology ranged from pastoral visits to the parishes and the preaching of *sagradas missões* (sacral missions) to the founding of schools, the promotion of new devotions and the creation of new lay associations. The new way of

13 The parishes of Águas Belas and Bom Conselho were created in the 1830s; towards the end of the nineteenth century, the parishes of Quipapá, Panelas and Correntes were formed.

14 The *livro do tombo* is a registration of the activities of the diocese. I will refer to it as 'DG I' (Diocese de Garanhuns, livro de tombo I).

celebrating mass emphasized the importance of the hereto so difficult to attain sacraments. Dom João Tavares de Moura was not very happy with the type of piety he found in Garanhuns, and on arrival in the diocese he immediately started to reform the local religious customs. Catechism and frequent communion were propagated, not only during Mass but also through missions. These missions were held throughout Brazil and generally "incited strong feelings of remorse and penance, and created the appropriate climate for missionaries to convince the people of the wrongness of some customs," as historian De Groot (1996:84) points out. For instance, it is recorded that in 1921 the missions performed holy communion for 1,500 men and 4,000 women, and consecrated 102 marriages (DG I:12vo.). Apparently, especially the female inhabitants of the diocese were enthusiastic about the new religious instruction.

NEW DEVOTIONS

As observed above, a second instrument used by the ultramontane campaign was the introduction of new devotions and the founding of new religious associations for the laity. The new devotions were the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Holy family, and especially the devotion to Mary. The existing lay groups - the brotherhoods - continued their relatively independent existence. Attempts to reform them often caused problems, and the founding of new groups avoided direct confrontations while simultaneously undermining the prestige of the brotherhoods (Micelli 1985:97, Oliveira 1985:285-6). This clerical strategy proved successful, also because the new groups addressed women while the brotherhoods were almost exclusively men's associations (Beozzo 1977:749). The aim of the new groups was the 'spiritual completion' of the faithful. In contrast to the brotherhoods, they possessed no churches and had no autonomy because priests were members of the executive committee and present at the meetings.

Lay groups of European origin were implanted by the clergy throughout Brazil. The groups founded were *Apostolado da Oração* (Apostleship of Prayer), *Congregação Mariana* (Marian Congregation), *Pia União das Filhas de Maria* (Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary, shortened to Daughters of Mary, *Filhas de Maria*), and *Conferência de São Vicente de Paula* (Society of Saint Vincent of Paula).

The Apostleship of Prayer (shortened to *o Apostolado*) had been founded by Jesuits in France in 1844, and was devoted to the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In 1889 a decree of Pope Leo XIII consecrated humanity to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and this gave a great impetus to the devotion. It was spread in Brazil especially by French religious orders, for example, the Lazarists (Micelli 1985:97). The first Brazilian branch was founded in 1871 by Jesuits in the town of Ity (in the south of the country), and by 1910 there were 1,390 local branches throughout the country (De Groot 1996:104, 107).

The *Filhas de Maria* were founded by mission sisters of Dom Bosco, the Salesian religious order (Perry and Echeverría 1988:130), and like the *Congregação Mariana*, they focussed on the devotion to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (Oliveira 1985:286). A third movement with roots in the European Marian revival at the turn of the century was the *Legião de Maria* (Legion of Mary), founded in Dublin in 1921. This lay association arrived in Brazil only in the 1950s, but it expanded rapidly and by 1961 had 2,701 local branches (*praesidia*) (O Monitor 1958, Perry and Echeverría 1988:170, 255).

The Society of Saint Vincent of Paula - whose members are called *Vicentinos* - had a charitable task under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin. This movement, too, had been founded in France (1833) and soon became the most powerful lay association there (Perry and Echeverría 1988:98). By the 1930s, it had 20,000 members in Brazil (Perry and Echeverría 1988:169).¹⁵

Information on the lay associations in Garanhuns at the beginning of the twentieth century is scarce. The *Confraria das Almas* had disappeared, but it is not clear whether this was a direct result of ultramontane cultural politics. An inventory made upon the arrival of the first bishop shows the priests had made a start with the founding of new groups; however, many of them had a short life (DG I:9vo). Therefore, Dom João Tavares de Moura immediately started organizing new lay groups. Among others, he established a *Filhas de Maria* for young women and in 1921 reorganized the flagging chapter of the *Vicentinos* (DG I:13). Two of the ultramontane lay associations still exist in Garanhuns. Chapters of the Apostleship are present in all parishes. Groups of the *Vicentinos* - whose members try to alleviate the suffering of the poorest in their neighbourhood - function in ten of the twenty-six parishes of the diocese (Diocese de Garanhuns 1990).

SUPERSTITION

The third and last effect of the process of Catholic reform in Garanhuns was the fight against 'superstition'. Throughout the country, bishops closed chapels and sanctuaries that were in the hands of the laity or, in the case of larger places of pilgrimage, put them under the administration of European regular orders (Beozzo 1977:753-8, Micelli 1985:94-7). Priests received instructions to control the chapels that remained open. This control consisted of appointing a person to be responsible for the administration of the chapel and to report to the priest on a regular base. In the diocese of Garanhuns, the shrine in Freixeiras became the focus of the fight against 'superstition' and 'irregularities', as the clergy put it. The owners of the shrine apparently did not hand over its administration.¹⁶ Judging from the clerical descriptions of the customs in the place, the ultramontane reforms had totally passed over the saint's devotees. Apart from a *novena*, the yearly celebrations in the hamlet consisted of a feast that was not much to the liking of the clergy.

Surrounded by the insulting superstition of the plebs who come here every year in search of "miracles", in Freixeiras things occur that can only embarrass a civilization.¹⁷ (...) The toxic vapour of alcohol, indecent idle prostitutes and a filthy mob of debauchees represent the most disgusting episodes in this pagan scenery.¹⁸

The report in the journal *O Monitor*, a weekly of the diocese, further mentions "all kinds of prohibited games" and the crimes taking place during the week of the novena. In short, Freixeiras was seen as the "Sodom at the gates of the town" (O Monitor 1931a). The

15 In Europe it had expanded very rapidly. In 1848 there were already 1,000 local branches in France and 400 in other countries (Perry and Echeverría 1988:98). In the 1930s, there were 133,000 members throughout the world (Perry and Echeverría 1988:169).

16 The reasons for this are not clear. Dom Manuel Antonio de Paiva wrote nothing in the *Livro de Tombo*, so my only sources on the conflict are from *O Monitor*, the journal issued by the diocese.

17 *De envolta com a grosseira superstição da plebe, que para ali afluê anualmente em busca de "milagres", desenrdam-se em Freixeiras factos tão deponentes que só podem comprometter uma civilização* (O Monitor 1931a).

18 *Aos vapores tóxicos do alcool um debochado mulherio da vida airada e um bando sordido de crapulas representam nesse cenário pagão os episodios mais repugnantes* (O Monitor 1931a).

answer of Bishop Manuel Antônio de Paiva (1928-1937), who had succeeded Dom Moura, was a decree that interdicted priests from saying Mass in the sanctuary (O Monitor 1931c). The faithful were advised not to participate in the festivities in Freixeiras (O Monitor 1931a and 1932).¹⁹ This decree was never repealed and the local clergy is still not involved in the organization of the religious in Freixeiras. The effect is that no Masses are celebrated in the shrine (Mariz and de Theije 1991).

Illegal sanctuaries were not the only lay activity that bothered the Brazilian bishops and clergy in this period. 'Religious fanaticism' was another worry. From time to time, Brazilian Catholicism was confronted with holy men and women whose activities sometimes developed into messianic movements of various kinds. One of the largest movements was established by Antônio Conselheiro, a travelling *beato* who founded Belo Monte in Canudos, a place in the *sertão* of northern Bahia. Belo Monte had some 8,000 inhabitants when it was wiped off the map by government troops in 1897.²⁰

Another challenge to the authority of both the Church and the state was father Cícero, a priest in Juazeiro (a settlement in the backlands of Ceará), who came to be seen as a saint by the faithful. The first miracle took place in 1889, but the lack of recognition by Church authorities meant that the priest remained a controversial figure until his death in 1934. Suspension of his position as parish priest did not stop his growing popularity. Father Cícero entered politics and was elected and re-elected mayor of the town as well as to positions in state politics. The region of Juazeiro prospered, which in itself was a miracle in this drought-stricken *sertão*. He lived in Juazeiro for 62 years (1872-1934) and during this time the village was transformed into the second city of the state, with 50,000 inhabitants.²¹ More than Antônio Conselheiro, Father Cícero survived in the religious order of northeastern Brazil. Thousands of pilgrims still make the journey to visit his statue and the religious buildings in Juazeiro. From Garanhuns to Juazeiro is about 600 kilometres, but for most devotees of *Padim Cícó* this is no impediment.

AMBIGUOUS RESULTS OF ULTRAMONTANE CAMPAIGN

The least we can conclude with respect to the ultramontane campaign is that its results were ambiguous. Some lay associations that the clergy introduced in this period are still functioning in several parishes of the bishopric, including in that of São Vicente. The promotion of the importance of the sacraments for a good Catholic life seems to have taken roots in the life of many Catholics. Other customs, however, continued to be the way they were before, such as the veneration of Santa Quitéria in Freixeiras. This means that lay people reinterpreted or ignored the new doctrine and directives according to the local circumstances and their beliefs. For instance, in many places the brotherhoods resisted

19 See Alves (1980) and Maués (1987) for a similar case in Belém, Pará. In connection with this case, it is striking that two of Garanhuns' bishops were also (auxiliary) bishops in the capital of the state of Pará: Dom Mário Miranda Vilas-Boas, who left Garanhuns to become Archbishop of Belém, and Dom Milton Corrêa Pereira, who was a priest under Archbishop Mário before he became auxiliary Bishop of Belém and later Bishop of Garanhuns.

20 The best-known account is *Os Sertões*, by Euclides da Cunha, published in 1902. See also Nogueira 1978 and Robert Levine 1992. Mario Vargas Llosa wrote a novel based on the history (*La Guerra del fin del mundo*, 1981, translated as *The War of the End of the World*, 1984).

21 Ralph Della Cava's *Miracle at Joazeiro* (1970) is the most complete account available. For the perpetuation of the miracles of Father Cícero in stories told by devotees, see Slater (1986). See also Queiroz 1983.

the reformist actions of the clergy.²² In Garanhuns, the *Confraria das Almas* did not survive the developments, although the shrine of Santa Quitéria did.

Meanwhile, new dangers threatened the authority of the Catholic Church in the local religious order. At the turn of the century, Presbyterians from the United States had arrived in town. In 1900 they founded a college that rapidly gained the respect of the local elite. The work of the local branch of the *Liga contra o protestantismo* (League against Protestantism), which was founded by a priest in 1903, could not stop the expansion of Protestantism in the town. Nor could the preachings of the French Jesuit priest Camillo Torrend, a gifted preacher who travelled the country lecturing on the virtues of chastity and visited Garanhuns several times (O Monitor 1931b).

4.3 Continuation of ultramontane efforts, 1930-1960

Around 1930, the Brazilian Catholic Church brought an end to a period of profound restructuring of the institution. Compared with the situation at the turn of the century, the number of dioceses had increased fivefold and the number of parishes had increased correspondingly. In 1933, the diocese of Garanhuns had eighteen parishes and half a million inhabitants. The *seminário menor* had fourteen students, and at the *seminário maior* in Olinda thirteen seminarists from Garanhuns were preparing for their pastoral task (Lehmann 1933).

However, most goals of the ultramontane campaign had not yet been completely achieved. In the Brazilian Catholic Church, three processes characterized the period from 1930 to 1960, and all three had their repercussions in Garanhuns. First, the emphasis on institutional development would be continued. Second, a close relation between Church and state on a national level influenced regional and local developments. Third, since also the laity had not internalized the propagated piety, most clerical energy continued to be devoted to religious instruction and the fight against 'superstition'. These three interrelated points are the subject of this section. I will start with the first two.

A CATHOLIC NATION

The establishment of the Catholic Church in local communities made great strides. Large parishes were divided into smaller ones. The parish of São Vicente was established only in 1941. In 1939, the clergy had organized a large fund-raising campaign and the construction of the church was begun. The parish was separated from two other parishes and embraced part of the town of Garanhuns, three villages and dozens of hamlets in the countryside. By the time the third Bishop of Garanhuns was transferred (in 1945), the diocese had twenty-one parishes and around a hundred churches and chapels.

At the national level, the relation between Church and state changed profoundly. The Church sought and found support from the state under the direction of Dom Leme, who had become Cardinal of Rio de Janeiro in 1930 and had been leader of the Brazilian episcopate since the 1920s. During the populist regime of Getúlio Vargas (1930 - 1945), Church and state became allies. The relation between the Church and the secular powers

²² In several towns and cities (Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Salvador, Ouro Preto, São João del-Rei) brotherhoods still maintain the customs. Of course, this does not mean that they do the same things as two hundred years ago. It does mean, however, that these lay groups are still meaningful to the faithful, despite societal transitions and changed religious contexts (See De Theije 1990).

reached a stage of concerted action. Religious education was included in the curriculum at state schools. The ultramontane reformers "believed that the role of Catholicism in the nation was well established and that the march of progress would facilitate the propagation of ultramontane piety", as De Groot (1996:147) reports. At the national level, the laity were involved in the project of the Church by way of Catholic Action, a movement which was directed at the middle and higher classes of society, and included some militant groups.²³

The third Bishop of Garanhuns, Dom Mário de Miranda Vilas-Boas (1938-1945), was a pupil of Dom Leme. He also found support from the political elites, especially from Agamenon Magalhães who was governor of Pernambuco from 1937 to 1945. The political and religious leaders shared anti-communist feelings, as illustrated by the manifestations organized by the diocese (Assies 1992:60-67, DG I:77v^o). Magalhães also financed several Catholic congresses during this period (DG I:66).

CONSTANT CONCERN

The preoccupation with the religious instruction of the laity, and even of members of the clergy, remained an important guideline for the diocesan policy. As in the first period of the ultramontane campaign, lay associations were an important means with which to change the religious attitude of the laity. Heedful of the views of his tutor Leme, Dom Mário dedicated his first pastoral letter to Catholic Action, which would receive "constant concern" (DG I:37v^o). He reorganized the chapters of Catholic Action that his predecessor had founded. Furthermore, he founded a group called *Círculo Operário* (Workers' Circle), and was an important leader of the *Movimento Litúrgico* (Liturgical Movement). This movement had been founded in Europe and was introduced into Brazil by some bishops. It was affiliated with Catholic Action (Silva 1983:67, 344). Dom Mário felt that the laity should participate actively in the Mass and become acquainted with the Bible. The Mass had to be freed from what he called *adultrações litúrgicas* (liturgical adulterations) (Silva 1983:69). During this period, the first experiments with new forms of the Mass took place, as a way to teach the people the basic tenets of the Catholic faith (DG I:68v^o-70v^o, see also Silva 1983:71-72). Other measures applied in order to achieve this goal were confirmation classes and - again - the organization and guidance of lay associations.

One of the first actions of the new bishop was to initiate a course for catechists, which he taught personally (DG I:35). Dom Mário was a gifted speaker and used this talent in *tríduos litúrgicos* (liturgical tridua).²⁴ To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the diocese in 1943, he organized a *Congresso Eucarístico* (Eucharistic Congress) in which clergy and laity from throughout Brazil participated (Silva 1983:70). The most important means with which to teach the people about the liturgy was the missal. However, illiteracy was widespread and at the time 45% of the Brazilian population could not read. Therefore,

23 Dom Leme believed lay movements could play an important role in the pursuit of a Catholic nation. In 1935 he introduced Catholic Action in Brazil (Bruneau 1974:37). Catholic Action as a lay association was founded in Italy in 1867. For many years it remained a small movement. In 1904 it came under the control of the clergy (Lehmann 1990:91). Although its development was different in the various Catholic countries, in all it was an important ideological basis for the rise of Christian Democratic political parties after the Second World War (Mainwaring 1989:45-6).

24 A triduum is an ecclesial celebration lasting three days.

the masses were never reached.²⁵ By the second half of the 1940s, fifteen different types of lay association functioned in the parishes of Garanhuns. Those with the most followers were the *Vicentinos* and the Apostleship of Prayer. However, Catholic Action groups, which were so fervently advocated by Dom Mário, seem to have attracted only a very small number of faithful.²⁶

MORE ABERRATIONS

The fight against 'superstition' and 'irregularities' characterized Dom Mário's work. The bishop lashed out at what he called the superstition of the people, which he recognized in the bad taste applied during the decoration of altars and churches, the theatrical ceremonies during novenas, the custom of dressing up boys and girls as saints for processions, the profane melodies of the songs, fireworks at feasts and other "mutilations of the liturgy that enfeeble the true Christian spirit."²⁷ "This traditional festive and selfish Catholicism must seriously be combatted",²⁸ he wrote in his first pastoral letter to the faithful of Garanhuns (1938). The policy of explaining Church teachings - especially the mystery of the sacraments - during his many pastoral visits had positive results in the eyes of the bishop. After two years, his secretary recorded in the *Livro de Tombo* that

His eminence was gratefully and deeply impressed by the religiosity of the good people of the *agreste*. These simple and admirable people, whose belief in and love for the Church, if well-preserved and explained and guided every time, will guarantee the perpetuity of our Christian formation and a source of constant renovation.²⁹

Dom Mário's admiration of and satisfaction with the piety of the people suggest that the religiosity of many parishioners was to some degree affected by the type of preachings he had introduced. Unfortunately, we have no other sources concerning the reaction of the laity to the renewed pastoral in this period. The roots of the current participatory role of the laity in Mass and pastoral work, however, might lie here. It is important to realize that until that time the role of the priest was to say Mass in Latin, to carry out baptisms, and to consecrate marriages. The role of the people was restricted to hearing Mass and, principally in the rural area, attending prayer meetings organized by a lay person (like the type Severina organized in Água Limpa, as described in the previous chapter). As

25 The liturgical movement was never really directed at the masses. Instead the goal was to train the elite (intellectuals, students) in order to prepare them to teach the people. Thus in the liturgical movement, the distance between clergy and 'ordinary people' was maintained (Silva 1983:74, 344-6, Mainwaring 1989:54).

26 At the time of the departure of Dom Mário, in 1946, a statement of affairs was drawn up. Although eight of the twenty-one parishes only partially furnished the information, the data suggest that the success of the work of Dom Mário was limited. Catholic Action and Vocational Works (*Obra das Vocações*), both so resolutely propagated by the bishop, were active in only two of the parishes (DG I:80-88). The older movements scored much better. Apostleship of Prayer had thirteen groups in twelve parishes, and the *Vicentinos* had seventeen groups in fourteen parishes. The secretary of the diocese had earlier already recorded that Vocational Works was a small movement, consisting of a few representatives who collected money in the parishes (DG I:76vo). The influence of the pastoral guidance of the diocese with respect to the lay movements was apparently not great.

27 "*Adulterações litúrgicas, desvitalizadores do espírito cristão*" (Silva 1983:69).

28 "*Urge dar um combate sério a esse catolicismo tradicional, festivo e comodista*" (cited in Silva 1983:69).

29 "*De tudo, porém, trouxe S.E.R. a mais grata impressão, máxima de piedade do bom povo do agreste, essa gente simples e admirável cuja fé e amor à Igreja, se forem conservados e cada vez mais esclarecidos e orientados, representarão uma garantia de perpetuidade da nossa formação cristã e uma fonte de constantes renovações*" (DG I:46-78).

was shown, the only forms of lay association that attracted some of the parishioners were the Apostleship of Prayer and the Society of Saint Vincent.

Another episode in the history of local Catholicism shows that the campaign of outlawing irregularities was far from successful. Even among the clergy, the ultramontane campaign had not achieved its full result by the second half of the twentieth century. In Garanhuns, a very dramatic event in 1957 proved this. That year, on a cold evening in July, the fifth bishop of the diocese was murdered in his palace by one of his priests. Dom Francisco Expedito Lopes had arrived in Garanhuns in 1955, and soon discovered that some of his priests "lived a disorderly life, incompatible with their priestly office and dignity" (César 1994:68). A good conversation had been enough to put all but one of them right.

This priest - Father Hosana - had been a problem for Dom Expedito's predecessors ever since he had studied at the seminary. At that time, Bishop Manuel Antonio de Paiva (1929-1937) had sent Hosana away because he considered him not eligible to become a priest. After being ordained in a diocese in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, and having lived through a brief but tumultuous period as a priest in the neighbouring diocese of Pesqueira, the young priest had returned to Garanhuns and assumed the parish of Panelas. After serious problems with the local elite - among other things because he had used a gun to threaten the son of the prefect, Dom Juvêncio de Brito (1945-1954) - the fourth Bishop of Garanhuns and successor to Dom Mário - transferred him to the parish of Quipapá. In the meantime, he had started a farm in another municipality, where he spent most of his time. By the time Dom Expedito arrived in Garanhuns, the parishioners of Quipapá had complained on various occasions about their priest. Although the accusations were manifold, they now concerned the price he charged for administering the sacraments and his failure to teach catechism lessons at the schools in his parish. In fact, the priest "lived more outside the parish than engaged with religious matters", as some parishioners told the bishop (César 1994:69-70). When accusations of a sexual relation with a woman who lived with the priest were added to this, the bishop decided to remove him from the parish. However, the priest refused to leave his position. The bishop was then compelled to announce the suspension of *padre* Hosana, who again refused to accept this decision and settled the question by killing the bishop.

The inhabitants of Garanhuns often refer to the story of the murder of the bishop. Interestingly, people do not refer to the disobedience of the priest or to his sexual behaviour. Most of the time the story is used to illustrate the violence of northeastern society. According to several of my ex-neighbours, Garanhuns is known as far away as São Paulo for its degree of violence, because "over there [in Garanhuns] they even kill bishops."³⁰

THE END OF THE ULTRAMONTANE CAMPAIGN

The ultramontane efforts largely continued until the end of the 1950s. The moralization and catechizing of the laity remained a constant concern of the clergy. Meanwhile, the institution continued to grow and establish itself in all parts of Brazil. The foundation of the *Conferencia Nacional de Bispos Brasileiros* (National Bishops' Conference; CNBB) in 1952 may be seen as the crown on the efforts to build the institution. The CNBB would play an important role in Brazilian society in the years to come.

30 "Lá até se mata bispo!"

4.4 Prelude to liberationist Catholicism, 1960-1970

In the years that followed, Brazilian society changed rapidly, and this strongly affected the Church. The ingredients for the future had been prepared since the 1950s and put together during the first half of the 1960s, when the contours of the new, liberationist campaign started to become visible. I will discuss the two key elements of this preliminary work for the ideological campaign of liberationist Catholicism in Garanhuns. The first is the growing political unrest, especially in the countryside, and the measures taken by both state and Church to keep things under control. The second is the Vatican Council and its impact on local Catholicism. Both led to important changes in the attitude of the Church towards the laity and the idea of lay organizations.

SOCIAL UNREST

Dom José Adelino Dantes (1958-1967), successor to the murdered Dom Expedito, was confronted with the task of leading Catholic Garanhuns through a very turbulent period, one that would eventually lead to the military takeover in 1964. The social problems in Brazil increased quickly during the 1950s, due to rapid industrialization and the impoverishment of the countryside. The problems were worst in the Northeast, brought about by several years of extreme drought and the political developments there. In several states, politicians who were not allied with the landed elite gained power. One of them was Miguel Arraes, who was elected governor of Pernambuco in 1962, and was "in the eyes of the established powers a dangerous subversive supported by the communists" (De Kadt 1970:48, See also Skidmore 1967:282). But let us look at developments a few years earlier.

Already in the mid-1950s, the peasantry had started to organize. In Pernambuco, the first *Ligas Camponesas* (peasant leagues) were founded in 1955. These were organizations of agricultural workers in the *zona da mata*, the region of sugar-cane plantations.³¹ The leagues defended the rights of the workers and asked for land reform. Soon they spread through the state and neighboring Paraíba, and then through the rest of the Northeast and finally throughout the entire country. The leagues were politically independent and in combination with their juridical and economic demands, this produced charges of communism and a threat to social security in the eyes of politicians and military and Church officials (Novaes 1997). However, Governor Miguel Arraes of Pernambuco rendered support to the *ligas*, which made the situation still more threatening to the elites of the country (Hewitt 1969:390). Although the clergy recognized the social problems in the countryside, the Catholic Church considered the peasant leagues to be hostile movement (De Kadt 1970:24-31).

In response, in 1956 the Catholic Church started to create its own associations - rural syndicates - for agricultural workers. The plan was to organize a large, national movement with the aim of bettering the situation of the workers. The rural syndicates tried to find a solution for the differences between workers and landowners, as an alternative to a

31 The peasant leagues stemmed from an association of peasant at the Galilea plantation in Vitória de Santo Antão in Pernambuco. The lawyer Francisco Julião played an important role in the organization of the leagues. See Hewitt 1969, Julião 1972, Page 1987.

serious class conflict (Page 1987:185, Adriance 1986:31,43). The threat of the 'communist' peasant leagues contributed to the fervour of the pastoral agents during the creation of the rural syndicates. In 1962, SORPE (*Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco*, Pernambucan Service of Rural Orientation) was created in order to develop a Christian union movement in the state (De Kadt 1970:109, Novaes 1997:56-70). According to Houtzager (1998), it played a critical role in rebuilding the unions of Pernambuco in the period immediately after the military coup of 1964. In the region, Garanhuns was one of the first dioceses to create the unions.³² The actions were not limited to associations for the peasants. In January 1963 also a diocesan service of rural service was founded (*Serviço Diocesano de Assistência Rural*). The first parish to have a Catholic Union was Panelas. By 1963, all parishes had a chapter, including those outside the sugar-cane zone (DG I:171). When in 1964 the political and social chaos in the country came to a head, Dom Adelino wrote in the annals:

In this diocese we could let go it all over our heads, thanks to the preventive action of the Church that in time furnished all parishes and municipalities with a broad web of rural unions.³³

After the military took power, all peasant organisations except those of the Church were forbidden (Hewitt 1969:390).

Another initiative that surged through the northeast of Brazil was the Movement for Basic Education (*Movimento de Educação de Base*, MEB). The clergy reasoned that the social problems in the countryside were caused by a lack of good education. Under the leadership of Eugênio Sales,³⁴ the diocese of Natal (Rio Grande do Norte) started in 1958 an experiment involving the transmission of school lessons via radio. They made programmes for specific groups (e.g. youth, mothers, catechists), and each Sunday broadcast a Mass. Two years later, the CNBB proposed to the federal government a plan to set up a national network of 'radio schools'. The government would provide the material, and the Church would provide the personnel. This project was started in 1961, also under the name MEB (De Kadt 1970). Studies on the Church in this period emphasize the important role of the Movement for Basic Education in raising the consciousness of the poor population (Adriance 1986:51-52, Azevedo 1987:27, 44 n.17, Mainwaring 1986:87-90). However, in the application of the MEB project the pastoral agents encountered many practical problems and in each diocese it materialized in a different way. In Garanhuns the first broadcast took place only in 1963, at a fixed time from a local radio station (DG I:172). Less than two years later, the broadcasts had to be stopped due to financial problems. The new military government refused to finance the project (DG I:189) and the political tension, including persecution of leaders of the movement, meant the end of this initiative (De Kadt 1970:146, Nova 1986). It remains a question whether the MEB project had much influence during this short period. Anyway, the radio is still an important means of communication in the vast diocese. Today a diocesan communication team broadcasts a weekly programme on one of the local commercial channels.

Although they did not function for very long, both the formation of unions for rural

³² According to DG I:170, Garanhuns was the first diocese to engage in the founding of rural unions in Pernambuco.

³³ "Nesta diocese, graças a ação preventiva da Igreja, que, a tempo, ... paróquias e municípios com vasta rede de sindicatos rurais, foi possível manter-se afastado a onda de agitação" (DG I:175).

³⁴ The actual archbishop of Rio de Janeiro.

workers and the movement for basic education mark the introduction of a new conceptualization of lay organization. Whereas in the previous period the mobilization efforts were inward-looking and directed at creating specifically Catholic lay groups with strong devotional goals, the emphasis now shifted to the contribution to broader social movements. Increasingly, the idea was to build coalitions with other militants - such as labour unions, peasant leagues and student groups - in order to achieve commonly held goals. Catholics would contribute through their participation in these movements to a fundamental change of society inspired by their beliefs (Smith 1991:53-55).

Meanwhile, the fear of a communist revolution grew substantially, not only in landlords and traditional power-holders, but also among moderate parts of society. In the turbulent years before the military coup, the CNBB had become a powerful mouthpiece for critics, but after 1960 the anti-left groups gained power among the bishops. When the military performed the coup, the CNBB supported their action (Mainwaring 1989:102). The new government did away with the existing political parties and created two new ones: the National Reform Alliance (*Aliança Renovadora Nacional*, ARENA) for the government, and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, MDB) for the moderated opposition. The military immediately started suppressing the organizations of peasants and workers, and of leftist groups. From 1968 onwards, the policy of the government was increasingly aimed at the further institutionalizing of its power and this resulted in the severe repression of social protests (De Groot 1991:130-141). When the political repression became systematic in 1968, especially through Institutional Act No. 5, the protests from the Church grew in both number and intensity.

SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND ITS AFTERMATH

The second key element of this period was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The most important result of the meetings of bishops from all over the world was the revision of the role of lay people in the Catholic Church. While in previous times, the lay movements had functioned primarily as a way to control the laity, now the creed became the real participation of ordinary people in the Church. In Brazil, the first experiments involving the handover of religious tasks to lay people had taken place already in the 1950s.³⁵ Now these experiments found recognition and legitimization in the decisions of the bishops (Lehmann 1990, Smith 1991:99).³⁶ The exact details of the new role the laity would play in Catholicism would become clear only after 1968.

For two reasons, 1968 was a turning point in the development of Brazilian Catholicism. First, the relation between the Church and the state changed profoundly. Roman Catholic activists were one of the very few groups in society that took a firm stand in the political

35 Lay and religious members of Catholic Action started the Service of Rural Assistance (*Serviço de Assistência Rural*, SAR) in 1948 in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte. The SAR initiated courses and held so-called rural missions, with the aim of setting up community organizations (Adriance 1986:25-28, Page 1987:183). Also in Natal the first experiments with lay ministry were held, from 1962 onwards (Teixeira 1988:67-72, Adriance 1985:138).

36 In one of the documents of the meeting, the task for the laity was expressed as follows: "The Church has not yet been truly established, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there exists a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy ... very many men can hear of the gospel and recognize Christ only by means of the laity who are their neighbours. In fact, wherever possible, the laity should be prepared, in more immediate cooperation with the hierarchy, to fulfill a special mission of proclaiming the gospel and communicating Christian teachings." (Ad Gentis, §21, cited in Lehmann 1990:132).

opposition (Skidmore 1967:321). More and more priests and bishops became victims of the military regime. They were accused of communist sympathies and subversive actions. Slowly the Church started to raise its voice against the violations of human rights.

In the midst of the political transformations in Brazil and other Latin American countries, the regional sequel to the Second Vatican Council was held in Medellín, Colombia.³⁷ This meeting of all Latin American bishops discussed the papal document *Populorum Progressio*, which dealt with the inequality between poor and rich countries. The bishops translated the document into an analysis of the inequality in the poor countries. The 'preferential option for the poor' was born (Lehmann 1990:109). Base communities were seen as the way to materialize the participation of laity in the Church. These lay groups had the task of realizing the 'liberation of the poor'. They would become the ecclesial structure and source for the evangelization of the masses (Teixeira 1988:290-294). This explicit choice for the fate of the poor formed the basis for the liberation theologies developed in the decades that followed (Lehmann 1990:109).

After 1968 the Brazilian Catholic Church, backed by the ideological foundation of the preferential option for the poor, became the most liberationist on the continent. The Church was the mouthpiece for criticism of the regime. The foundation of the CNBB and the CELAM - as well as the numerous pastoral letters and public acts criticizing the military government and protesting about injustices within Brazilian society - were clear signs of changes in the Brazilian Catholic Church. Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Recife, is generally acknowledged as being one of the founders of the liberationist campaign.³⁸ While auxiliary Bishop of Rio de Janeiro, he had been involved with the founding of the CNBB and CELAM. As Archbishop of Recife and Olinda,³⁹ he further worked out his ideas, for instance in his pastoral letters (Smith 1991:117, 138).

Censorship of all publications and the arrest and subsequent torture of many activists led to a movement in defence of human rights. In 1973, the CNBB organized a national campaign to educate the people about human rights (Bruneau 1982:69-70). Two years later, when it was clear that the government was not going to change its practices, this campaign developed into a network of Commissions for Justice and Peace (*Comissão Justiça e Paz*), with committees in different regions of the country and great international support (Bruneau 1982:80-81). Also, at the beginning of the 1970s the Church published two important critical studies of the economic model of the government. The struggle for land and the marginalized position of the indigenous population of Brazil led to the foundation of the Pastoral Land Commission (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra* - CPT) and the Indigenous Missionary Council (*Conselho Missionário Indígena* - CIMI). Both the CPT and the CIMI functioned under the wings of the CNBB, which protected them from suppression by the dictatorship, and both are still active. In Garanhuns they have a small staff of religious and lay workers, and an office in the centre of town. CIMI also has missionaries who live in or near the indigenous territories in the region. These are the town of Águas Belas - in the extreme west of the diocese, where the Fulni-ó live - and the neighbouring diocese

37 The Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) was modelled after the CNBB, and held its first meeting in 1955 (Smith 1991:83).

38 Others were Dom Paulo Arns in São Paulo and Dom Pedro Casaldáliga in São Felix do Araguaia in the state of Mato Grosso, in the Amazon.

39 He was assigned that position eleven days after the military takeover in 1964.

of Pesqueira, where the Xucurú Indians live. The CPT helps peasants in conflicts with landowners and supports the syndicates of agricultural workers in the diocese. Furthermore, they help the people who live in *assentamentos* (provisional camps on land occupied by landless peasants) and those who succeeded in receiving land from the government and now have to build a new life on it. The lay and religious persons involved in these groups are among the *basistas* of the diocese.

NEW PRIESTS

For Garanhuns and especially the parish of São Vicente, the meeting of the bishops in Rome during the Second Vatican Council had other consequences. Dom José Adelino Dantes established contacts in Rome with various European bishops in order to find priests who would come to Garanhuns. As a result, three European priests soon came to relieve the shortage of clergy in the diocese. Two of them - Father Gerbrando and Father Tiago - were Dutch, and they took care of the parish of São Vicente. Father Tiago would later become Bishop of Garanhuns. The parish remained under the care of Dutch priests until 1981.

Father Gerbrando and Father Tiago were installed in March 1965 (DG I:180v^o). There had been no resident priest until then. In combination with the introduction of a new liturgy in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, including the Mass in vernacular language,⁴⁰ this meant profound changes for the parishioners. However, many aspects of religious life remained the same. The pastoral policy of the new priests continued to focus on the guidance of the existing lay associations, such as the Apostleship of Prayer and the Legion of Mary. Only after some time Father Gerbrando and Father Tiago introduced Bible readings in their guidance of the lay groups. At the meeting of the Apostleship of Prayer, the priest recommended that the members of the group should read the Bible at home. The innovation of the pastoral policy went no further than this in the first years after the Second Vatican Council.

The priests' foreign background created specific difficulties. Of course, language was a problem in the first months or perhaps even years. Additionally, they experienced a profound culture shock. Looking back on this period, Dom Tiago said:

When we started here, we hardly had any insight into the situation of Latin America or the direction the Council was sending us. We were just not well prepared for this.⁴¹

The social problems in their parish, the shocking poverty and the lack of facilities demanded a response. In the first instance, the priests' response was charity. With financial aid from their homeland, they built a social centre; in later years they acquired subsidies from the Brazilian governmental organization *Legião Brasileira de Assistência*.

We built a social centre, which was an attempt to activate the people, with the limited resources we had. So that the people would start to participate in the activities, in spite of the difficult situation they were living in. However, we did not have the ideas of today, of community, to form base communities that decide what is going to happen. We offered certain services that we thought were necessary, like a school, a health centre, distribution of food. It was more in the line of aid.⁴²

40 For the Dutch priests this was a hindrance because they were still learning Portuguese.

41 Interview 910315-251 / sheet 1: "*Quando a gente começou a trabalhar, a gente começou a trabalhar com muito pouca visão, não é, da linha, da América Latina, do Concílio. A gente não estava bem preparado para isso não.*"

42 Interview 910315-251 / sheet 2: "*Mas é, foi construído e realmente foi uma tentativa dentro das*

When some years later a third Dutch priest came to boost the team, more time became available to develop a new pastoral policy. This would have major consequences, as I will show in the next section.

INTENSIFICATION OF PASTORAL WORK IN SÃO VICENTE'S PARISH

Thus, within three decades after the foundation of the parish of São Vicente the roles of priests and lay people had undergone fundamental changes. After 1964, pastoral works became more intensive because of the presence of the two Dutch priests. Later, more Dutch priests came to the parish and for several brief periods there were three priests present. The foreign priests arrived in a period of turmoil, because both national Brazilian politics and the global Catholic Church underwent drastic changes in the early 1960s. The miserable life conditions of their parishioners shocked the priests and they soon started all kinds of social work. Eventually, however, more and more lay people started participating in the construction of the religious, a tendency that the Second Vatican Council strongly reinforced. This led to two important processes in the local Church. The first was the elaboration of the concept of base community and the promotion of these ideas in the parishes. The second was the establishment of all kinds of new lay movements. In the next section I will deal with both processes.

4.5 Church for the people, 1970-1990

From the 1970s onwards, the face of Catholicism in Garanhuns started to change dramatically. In this period the ideological campaign of liberationist Catholicism spread across Brazil and profoundly affected Garanhuns. In many respects, this liberationist campaign was similar to the earlier ultra-montane campaign. From the 1950s onwards, an institutional reform had taken place under the direction of Dom Hélder Câmara. Also, we saw the new interpretation of the concept of lay organization in Catholic practice. Yet again, changes were not accomplished so easily. The ultimate goal was to change society, and for this a transformation of the beliefs and religious practices was - once again - a condition. Again, this would be the most difficult aspect of the ideological campaign.

Several specific circumstances contributed to the development of the local liberationist Church in Garanhuns, of which the openness of some members of the clergy and the troubled life situation of a large part of the population are among the most influential. The location of the diocese - in the midst of the region with the most serious social problems, which in the past had led to the first liberationist-like initiatives - certainly empowered this process. Furthermore, the proximity of Recife and its Catholic leader Dom Hélder Câmara legitimized and gave authority to the project of organizing CEBs and constructing a 'Church for the people'. In this respect, many circumstances were very favourable for the campaign of liberationist Catholicism in Garanhuns.

However, as happened with earlier campaigns, many forces headed off in other directions, and the liberationist campaign was certainly not one-dimensional. The ideological

condições que a gente tinha para animar o povo, para participar e movimento, não é, também na sua situação. Mas não é aquelas idéias de hoje, sabe, de comunidade, de formar comunidade, e a comunidade vai decidir, não é, o que vai fazer, mas a gente oferecia, certas coisas, que a gente já, não é, estava pensando, que era necessário, escola, saúde, não sei o que, distribuição de alimentos, essas coisas, não é. Então foi muito mais na linha de uma assistência."

and organizational changes promoted by the liberationist clergy also had other consequences, unintended though they were. In particular, the emphasis on lay participation gave rise to many other, smaller campaigns. Although they lacked the support of the local Catholic authorities, the groups that carried out these campaigns achieved considerable influence and thus made an important contribution to the contemporary religious order in Garanhuns. In this section, I will first go into the specific circumstances of the ideological and organizational developments of the Catholic Church in Garanhuns. I will then expand on the involvement of the laity in the liberationist project. Finally, I will give an account of the 'unintended consequences' of the liberationist campaign to instigate lay participation.

NEW PASTORAL IDEAS

The first step in the process of applying the ideas of liberationist Catholicism was taken in 1969. The Bishop of Garanhuns created a commission to coordinate the pastoral of the whole diocese. This commission started by making an inventory of the situation in all parishes, in preparation for the first *assembléia diocesana*, which took place in 1970. According to Dom Tiago, then-Bishop Dom Milton Corrêa Pereira (1967-1974) "was very open to this, he was not very forward, but he had an open mind and gave all his support".⁴³

According to the clergy involved in the developments in the 1970s, two things were very important. The first was the meetings and projects of the regional chapter of the CNBB, Nordeste 2. Its president at the time was Father Marcelo Pinto Cavaleira,⁴⁴ who was able to incite the bishops of the Northeast to become involved in the liberationist project and to spur them to develop new ideas and pastoral policies. In Recife, Father Marcelo was a close collaborator of Dom Hélder.

Under the leadership of Dom Hélder, the bishops and clergy of the Northeast continued to give further content to the 'preferential option for the poor'. I mentioned above that from 1968 onwards the base communities became a central focus in the policy of liberationist Catholicism. In the document produced in Medellín, the CEBs were described as local communities of a size that made possible "brotherly" social relations between all members (CELAM 1985:15, 10 cited in Lehmann 1990:129). These communities would be transformed into "families of God" because they were a "germ of faith, hope and charity". They would be responsible for expanding the faith and taking care of the religious rituals, so that they would become the basic units of the Church (Lehmann 1990:129). Thus, from the start the CEBs were strongly connected to the ecclesial institution. The relation between clergy and base communities was maintained through publications and the participation of the clergy in the meetings of the CEBs, on the local, regional and national level (cf. Mainwaring 1989:127). In Brazil, the clergy or nuns founded the CEBs. In Garanhuns, the influence of members of religious orders was particularly important.

This brings us to the second element in the development of the liberationist campaign in the diocese of Garanhuns: the endeavour to involve the laity in liberationist ideals. An important chapter in the history of Garanhuns began with the arrival of three Franciscan

43 Interview 910315-251 / sheet 3: "O bispo era muito aberto para isso, não era muito avançado, mas era muito aberto e deu todo apoio."

44 In 1975 Dom Marcelo became Bishop of Guanabira, in Paraíba. Since 1995 he has been Archbishop of João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba.

friars in the town of Paranatama - an event that would turn out to be a great incentive for the whole diocese. These three friars had very liberationist ideas, and although the population of the town showed considerable hesitancy at first, they succeeded in introducing liberationist ideas and religious practices. They called themselves 'brothers' because they believed that the word 'friar' would distance them from the people, and they wanted to express their 'fraternity' with the poor. They lived in a simple house among the poor. Their pastoral work consisted of living and working with the people and slowly introducing a new way of believing and of reading the Bible, each time seeking to establish a connection between the religious texts, daily life and the socioeconomic situation of the poor. At the time, their lifestyle and the content of their sermons represented a sharp break with the past. Friar Jaime, one of the three missionaries, said:

There was already something, but that was more in a fundamentalist line, a bit Protestant. It was the Bible for the Bible, devotion and the Bible, without establishing a relation with life, the relation with life called liberation theology. This relation transforms. It changes the relationships between the people and in the community. So they had a celebration, with the Bible. But we introduced the new thing incited by Carlos Mesters and (...) it found a following, in the whole diocese.⁴⁵

Two of the three friars have since left Garanhuns. The third - Friar Jaime - is continuing his work. He is now pivotal in the coordination of the pastoral work in the diocese.

When in 1974 Father Tiago - a member of the group that organized the first diocesan pastoral plan in 1970 - was appointed Bishop of Garanhuns, the diocese definitively set a course towards a Catholicism directed at CEBs and the preferential option for the poor.⁴⁶ In the years that followed, the emphasis in the pastoral works changed from the existing devotional lay associations (such as the Apostleship) to evangelization in the rural communities and poor urban neighbourhoods. The changes came about slowly because the existing religious organization was not easy to transform. This applied to the practices and beliefs of the laity as well as to several members of the clergy. The reformist priests did not succeed in convincing all others of the necessity of the liberationist campaign. Many other obstacles were in the way, for example, the political elites in the villages and towns who did not want to hand over their authority and power to the rural unions that had resulted from the CEBs.

SUCCESS OF A PROJECT

The story of the water in the communities of Olho de Água and Brejo de Palma can serve as an example of an event that became an important milestone in the local history of the CEBs. A water supply project, inaugurated by Dom Hélder Câmara on 6 January 1980, became a contemporary miracle story. The year before, however, many difficulties had had to be surmounted. 1979 was a year of extreme drought in the Northeast.⁴⁷ For

45 Interview 900502-52 / sheet 5: "*Havia já alguma coisa, agora era na linha mais fundamentalista, um pouco protestante, era a bíblia pela bíblia, a devoção e a bíblia, sem relacioná-la muito com a vida, essa relação com a vida que é chamada, teologia da libertação. Essa é transformadora, ela altera o relacionamento dentro das pessoas e dentro da comunidade. Então se fazia um culto, celebração com a bíblia. Agora nós introduzimos isso novo, que é inspirado em Carlos Mesters e (...) isso pegou de fato em toda Diocese.*"

46 The nomination of another candidate, Father Marcelo Pinto Cavaleira, was thwarted by the military.

47 1979 was only the beginning of a four-year period of drought, during which over 4,000 people died of hunger. In the diocese of Garanhuns, the municipalities of Caetés, Iati and Águas Belas suffered the most (CPT-CEPAC-IBASE 1988).

many people, this meant travelling large distances to get drinking water. In the surroundings of Paranatama, inhabitants of several communities started to discuss the problem at their community meetings. One difficulty was they had to cross a highway to get water, and after an accident in which a boy was almost killed, they decided to try to construct a water supply system by channelling water from the source to the communities. For many community members this was a Utopian idea, but others believed they could do it. They had listened very carefully to *frei* Jaime, the priest who counselled the community, and believed that if they combined forces they would be able to change the situation.

Many technical problems - such as distance, having to cross a highway and the lack of gravity in some stretches - had to be solved. These, however, were nothing compared with the difficulties in finding support from the politicians and technocrats who would have to approve the project and supply the money for materials. The local mayor was the first to try to block the project, because he wanted to use the water to supply the town of Paranatama instead. However, when technicians from the local water company decided that the source was not large enough to make it profitable to lay a pipe to the town, his attempt was neutralized. He then tried to buy the land on which the source was located, but the owner refused to sell it. His attempt to expropriate the land also failed. By that time, the communities had secured the help of FASE.⁴⁸ However, the department of the Ministry of Transports responsible for country roads (the DNER⁴⁹) refused to provide the help it had promised, that is, to help traverse the highway. But by this time the work was almost complete and the people decided to do it themselves.

There was also much resistance to the plans from within the communities. Some believed it was God's will that they should walk these distances to fetch water, that in this way, He would save people from their sins. Others simply did not believe it was possible to accomplish such a major project without the help of politicians and the rich. To begin with, only a handful of community members turned up to work on the project. After some gifts from FASE had arrived - and thus building materials could be bought - the confidence of the communities grew. On subsequent occasions, more than 150 volunteers reported for work. However, those who were opposed to the plan now realized that the project was becoming serious, and halfway through the construction the cisterns were sabotaged. This reduced the confidence and enthusiasm of the communities, and rumours of more serious attacks on persons involved in the project led to a drop in the number of volunteers. After a while, however, the possibility of danger subsided and again some 150 people turned up to work. The project gained speed by the end of the year, when the volunteers started working two days a week. On the day the highway was illegally crossed, some four to five hundred people were present - a force large enough to convince the engineers to cooperate.

Within eighteen months, the communities of Olho de Água and Brejo de Palma had succeeded in constructing a pipe system almost five kilometres long, with several cisterns

48 *Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional* (Association of Organizations for Social and Educational Assistance) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to development and educational work. At the national level, FASE enters into agreements with federal, state and municipal organisms to elaborate, evaluate, monitor and audit projects. FASE was founded in 1961 and supports grassroots organizations and social movements aimed at improving people's living conditions.

49 DNER stands for *Diretório Nacional de Estradas de Rodagem*.

and a pump to lift the water eleven metres. This project serves to illustrate the many constraints CEBs encounter when their beliefs inspire them to take matters into their own hands. These difficulties are important in explaining the failures of the liberationist Catholic practice, as will be shown in the following chapters of this book. Nevertheless, the history of the water project is an example of the consequences of the liberationist campaign in a rural community. The support from the Catholic Church and the rooting of the whole project in the base community of Olho de Água lend a reputation to the project that goes beyond an ordinary, practical betterment of life conditions. It still serves as an example for other communities in the diocese. In the many stories told about it, the success of the communities of Olho de Água and Brejo de Palma is presented as a grace of God. Two verses from a *literatura de cordel* story by Valdeck de Garanhuns may exemplify this. The second couplet goes:

Who fights for justice / Makes of love his bed
Has the sympathy of God / Because God loves all
This way was a gift of God / the water in Paratama⁵⁰

Then it tells the whole story of the project, ending with the words:

Therefore I leave a message / for old and young
Do not give up friend / have faith, fight again
Because there is no power on earth / bigger than the power of the people⁵¹

Those present at the inauguration of the project by Dom Hélder Câmara and Dom Tiago Postma witnessed a miracle. During the consecration, water not only arrived through the pipe, but a small, rapidly developing cloud appeared in the sky, and before the end of Mass, thunder and lightning announced the arrival of a lot of water. "This was a miracle among the biggest we have ever seen,"⁵² said the community leader of Olho de Água.

Thus, many communities throughout the diocese were influenced by the liberationist campaign. Communities received assistance in all kinds of projects and learned to interpret the Bible along so-called liberationist lines. Many other communities, however, did not follow so easily. The liberation of the poor proved to be a slow process in the diocese. In the following decade, many communities would rework their understandings of liberationist Catholicism in various ways. The following chapters will provide many examples of and explanations for this. For now it suffices to underscore the importance of the example set by the water project of the communities of Olho de Água and Brejo de Palma.

LAY AUTONOMY

The dedication of part of the clergy to liberationist Catholicism was not always welcomed as heartily as suggested by the success of the community action described above. Some priests were rather rigorous in their carrying out of the pastoral plans. In the parish of São Vicente, this led in 1965 to a severe quarrel between a newly arrived Dutch priest and members of the Apostleship of Prayer. There is no documentation about the clash in the archives of the parish, and after so many years the cause of the conflict is no longer clear, but the end result was that the lay association was dissolved by the priest. I was

50 *Quem luta pela justiça / No amor faz sua cama / Tem de Deus a simpatia / Porque Deus a todos ama / Foi assim um Dom de Deus / A água em Paratama.*

51 *Por isso eu deixo um recado / Pra quem for velho ou novo / Não desista companheiro / tenha fé, lute de novo / Pois não há força na terra / Maior que a força do povo.*

52 Interview 901121-184 / sheet 17: "Foi um milagre dos maiores que a gente já viu."

not able to find out what exactly had happened, but it is tempting to imagine that the liberationist-oriented priest saw little advantage in a group solely occupied with Mass and prayers. Such a conflict of concerns does, of course, involve some contradiction. Changes in the Church depended much on the revaluing of lay participation. But the laity may want to participate in a way that deviated from the ideals of the clergy. Interestingly, after the parish came under the care of a Brazilian priest again in 1981, some women revived the Apostolado and it still functions today (Psv 1959, Psv 1957).

As was to be expected, the emphasis on lay participation in Catholicism had other - perhaps unintended - consequences. More space for the laity meant more space for the development of groups other than base communities. Although in the international Catholic Church this tendency started in the 1960s, in Brazil results started to be felt only in the 1980s.⁵³ In contrast to the 'old' lay associations - which came into existence through initiatives of the clergy and remained under the guidance and authority of the institutional Church and the parishes - the new lay groups that developed around this time withdrew from the structure. Della Cava (1990) uses the term 'new movements' for some twenty types of associations that mostly came into existence after the Second Vatican Council (Bruneau 1982:97, Della Cava 1990:9). Most of these emerged in Europe, and all share a focus on individual spirituality. In Brazil these groups attracted a large number of faithful (Comblin 1983). In Garanhuns, three of these groups are important: the *Cursilho de Cristandade*, the Focolare Movement, and the *Renovação Carismática Católica*.

The *Cursilho de Cristandade* was founded in 1949, in the Spanish diocese Ciudad Real in Palma de Mallorca. Its main activity is the organization of intensive courses aimed at the renovation of its members' faith. These courses developed from the need for a profound preparation for the yearly pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. They were also used as a way to prepare the leaders of the local Catholic Action. The courses were a success, and soon they were also being used outside Catholic Action, in other dioceses and, finally, in other countries (Dana 1975:13-20). In 1962 the first course was organized in Brazil for members of the Spanish community in São Paulo. Soon Brazilians started to participate and the movement spread throughout the country (Dana 1975:21). Although the highpoint of success in Brazil was the 1970s, the movement is still active in the country, with followers mainly among the upper middle class (Bruneau 1974:173). In Garanhuns the members of the *Cursilho* are physicians, lawyers and other members of the better-off part of the population. Their most important activity is a yearly three-day retreat, which is held separately for men and women.

The second new movement to find a following in Garanhuns was the Focolare movement. The Focolare movement was started in Italy in 1943 by a woman called Chiara Lubich. Its central tenet is 'the spirituality of unity' and its members seek to 'live the Gospel on a daily basis' (<http://focolare.org>). On a national scale, it is a small group, but in

53 From 1982 onwards, the conservative pressure from Rome became stronger. The liberationist forces in Brazilian Catholicism started to lose ground (Mainwaring 1989:265). In the literature, several causes are identified for this process. In the first place, the Brazilian Catholic Church lost its role as mouthpiece for society's protests because the dictatorship was relaxing. In the second place, at the international level forces that did not support the liberationist ideals became stronger, among other reasons because of the appointment of conservative bishops from 1985 onwards (Smith 1991:223). This group used the same method to spread its ideology as the liberationist clergy had done, i.e. via lay associations.

Garanhuns it has left important traces.⁵⁴ In the Colina neighbourhood, a street was named after the major religious occasion of the movement: Mariápolis. Dom Adelino Dantes, the sixth Bishop of Garanhuns (1958-1967), was the first Brazilian bishop to join this movement. He regularly organized a Mariápolis in his diocese. Among the clergy, Father Acácio - once a priest in the São Vicente parish - and the nuns of the Colégio Santa Sofia, as *Damas*, were very active in the movement.

The Focolare movement no longer attracts many followers in Garanhuns. This is partly the result of the departure in 1967 of Dom José Adelino Dantes and Father Acácio Rodrigues Alves⁵⁵, which caused a loss of support from the ecclesial institution in the diocese. Furthermore, many members of the Focolare movement seemed to have moved over to the third and last movement I will discuss here: the *Renovação Carismática Católica* (Movement of Charismatic Renewal).

The size and influence of this movement gives it an important place in contemporary Brazilian Catholicism. The Charismatic Renewal combines the Catholic sacramental and liturgical forms with elements usually associated with Pentecostalism, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit and charismata. The core of the belief is the 'experience of God', which makes God a source of power in daily life. The active presence of God in the lives of the faithful is expressed as 'a new life in the Holy Spirit' that starts with a manifestation of this power through the 'gifts of the Spirit'. These gifts of the spirit - charismata - can be many. The best known is speaking in tongues (or glossolalia). Other gifts are healing and the deepening of belief. These charismata give a high degree of autonomy to the faithful, and this was something new and unknown to Catholicism.

The Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church originated in the United States during the second half of the 1960s. Catholic teachers and students at some universities discussed evangelical books that described the baptism in the Spirit. They, too, wanted to have this experience, which is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. The Catholic Church offered room for such an initiative after the Second Vatican Council. These academics then organized a retreat and, after reading and rereading the Acts and praying for this grace of God, one of the participants received the Holy Spirit. One after the other followed, and the movement started to spread rapidly, first through the United States and then through the world. In 1970 it arrived in Brazil, through the mediation of a North American Jesuit living in Campinas in the state of São Paulo. The first followers were mainly youngsters, and youths are still an important part of the movement. It is not known how many Catholics in Brazil call themselves Charismatics, but the movement is still growing. De Groot (1989:53) puts the figure at two million. According to Della Cava (1990:4), 110 out of a total of 240 dioceses had charismatic groups in 1988. Such numbers come close to the number of members of basic communities counted ten years earlier. The least that can be said is that the Charismatic Movement became an important element of the religious landscape of Brazil, and that many Catholics have or have had contacts with the movement.

Characteristically, the new movements are not connected to the local Catholic

54 The movement claims to have 4.5 million followers in 182 countries.

55 In 1962 he became bishop of the new diocese of Palmares, which was partly separated from Garanhuns. He continued to be an important leader of the Focolare movement.

institutional structure, but have their own national and international organization. Comblin (1983:228) therefore concludes that these movements have the capacity to undermine the power of institutional Catholicism and (perhaps unintentionally) to work towards a new model of Church. They are not integrated in the local Church, and they recruit their own leaders and priests. In a sense, this makes these movements 'more lay' than the other lay groups in Catholicism, including the CEBs.

POVERTY CONTINUES

Over the years, the dictatorship relaxed and 1979 saw the beginning of the *abertura* (gradual political opening). In 1985 political power was transferred to a civil president; four years later, the first president was elected by popular vote. In Pernambuco, Miguel Arraes - the governor ousted by the military in 1964 - again became governor in January 1987.⁵⁶

However, democratization did not change the position of most Brazilians. Figures from the IBGE show that the poorest half of the economically active population receive only 12% of the national income, while the richest 10% have almost half (48.1%) at their disposal. In the last decades, the gap between rich and poor has widened (Oliveira 1993:32). Almost half the *nordestinos* have an income below the national minimum (44.7% vs. 27.2% nationally) (Veja 1990). Figures also reveal that the Northeast exceeds the rest of the country on all indices of misery. In the period 1970-1980, life expectancy at birth in the northeast of Brazil was 49 years; for the lowest income group, however, it was only 42.8 years (Wood and Carvalho 1988:93,95). Child mortality decreased between 1980 and 1990, but by the end of the decade 75 of every 1000 children born in the Northeast died before the age of one year (Oliveira 1993:16). In the Northeast, illiteracy is almost twice the national average (35.9% vs. 18.3%), and only 15.5% receive more than eight years of education (vs. 24.3% nationally). The Northeast has most child labour (15.0% of children aged between ten and seventeen; nationally, the percentage is 12.1) and more than half of the women on the labour market receive less than a single minimum salary (56.4% vs. 37% at the national level). Only 22.8% of labourers are officially registered (i.e. possess a *carteira assinada*; nationally, the figure is 39.1%) and 70.7% of the population are not included in the social security system (*previdência*; nationally 49%). This means that a large part of the population is illegally excluded from benefits such as health insurance, unemployment compensation and retirement pensions. This applies to women more than men (Neuhouser 1989b:694).

The liberationist Church of Garanhuns could count on an institutional structure that had been built up over the last three centuries. Sixty years after its foundation, the diocese of Garanhuns covered 8,734 km², and included twenty-five municipalities, with a total population of 650,000. The diocese united twenty-two parishes and was organized into six pastoral sections, each of which responded to specific social and economic circumstances in its area. At that time, thirty-one priests lived in the diocese, as did more than a hundred friars and nuns.⁵⁷ The laity operate about 500 base communities in the diocese, as well as many other lay groups. In the following chapter, these lay movements will be further investigated.

56 According to Pereira (1997:106) Arraes again gained much support from rural workers.

57 Data from a leaflet issued by the diocese in 1988, titled *Diocese the Garanhuns, 60 anos evangelizando*.

4.6 Conclusion: From *quilombo* to base community

In this chapter, the religious order was presented in its historical context. I showed how different campaigns to form and reform local Catholicism left their traces in the religious order of Garanhuns. The contemporary variation in religious forms and meanings is to a large extent related to the different campaigns of cultural politics carried out in the past by different actors. The clergy are a group of actors that repeatedly tried to establish specific practices and ideologies. They initiated 'campaigns' according to the prevailing ideas and policies in the national and global Church. In these attempts to reform the existing religious practices and significations, lay associations were often the main focus of attention.

In colonial and empire times, one hardly could speak of organized cultural campaigns on the part of the clergy. During this period, the organization of the religious was largely in the hands of the laity. The ultramontane campaign that followed at the end of the nineteenth century, however, was a clear attempt to change both the organization and the content of Catholicism in Brazil. From the 1960s onwards, the liberationist campaign started to take over.

As I pointed out, the liberationist campaign was less a break with the past than is often assumed. Again the first step was to increase the organizational strength of the Church, and again the foundation of lay groups was the means with which to propagate the new ideology. The founding and guidance of base communities became the most important goal of pastoral practice. In these CEBs, the laity are the main actors. Perhaps more clearly than in the previous period, the liberationist campaign had to compete with 'counter-campaigns', the most important being the appeal to the laity of so-called new movements. In Garanhuns, the most important of these is the Charismatic Renewal Movement. Just like the ultramontane campaign, the liberationist campaign failed to completely reshape the religious order. And again, the main vehicle for ideological campaigning proved to be the phenomenon of lay associations.

To conclude this chapter, it is appropriate to maintain that the concept of cultural campaign directs attention towards organized endeavours to change the religious order. It also puts the focus of analysis on certain groups, in this case the clergy or sections of the clergy, whose role it is to form and change the religious order and/or society. The outcome of the campaigns they carry out, however, cannot be predicted by taking into account only the ideologies and actions of this group. Cultural politics do not work in a direct and immediate way. Since the final goal is always to 'change the minds of the people', many other forces are also involved. In this historical overview, it became clear that the cultural construction of the religious order is very complex. Continuity and renewal stand in a complex relation to each other. The religious order is produced as well as reproduced, and countless factors and actors play a role in this.

The limitations and potentials of cultural campaigns in the religious, as well as the interplay of continuity and change in the construction of it, is nicely illustrated by the case of Freixeiras. The place of pilgrimage still attracts tens of thousands of people every year, notwithstanding the banishment of Santa Quitéria (the decree by the second Bishop of Garanhuns, Dom Manuel, was never cancelled). On the other hand, the priests no longer preach against 'superstition' or 'irregularities' of this kind. Instead, most prefer to avoid

the phenomenon because they do not know what to do about it. In general terms, liberationist Catholicism tries to value 'popular devotion'. This may be one of the reasons most pilgrims are not told that their miraculous saint is not authorized by the local Church.⁵⁸ So, although the official status of the shrine has not changed, the attitude of the clergy has. Furthermore, when interviewing the pilgrims we found indications that the meaning the saint has for them has changed, too. Several respondents explained the significance of Santa Quitéria for their personal beliefs by saying "First God, then Santa Quitéria", thereby expressing a conception of sacred hierarchy that reveals the influence of the teachings of the Catholic Church since the ultramontane campaign (De Theije 1994:46-49).

It took many cultural campaigns to transform the first communities of the *agreste* of Garanhuns into base communities. Many efforts of both clergy and laity were in vain. Many other plans and ideas turned into established practice over the years. At the end of the 1980s, the public symbolic order presented a Catholic Church that was mostly in the hands of lay people, both practically and ideologically, as I will argue in the following chapters.

58 Another reason is that many people are simply not interested in this kind of detail. See Mariz and De Theije 1991 for a closer examination of what motivates pilgrims to visit Santa Quitéria.

5 The lay groups in the parish of São Vicente

The next question to be addressed is how the ideology promoted by the clergy and the *basistas* formed the current practices in the parish. I will treat the liberationist influences as an ideological campaign. As such, it is pursued by the actors fit for this, i.e. the clergy and the *basistas*. According to Ortner (1989a:12), we can only see the relationship between practice and structure “fully played out” in historical contexts. By building on the historical record described in the previous chapter, the ethnographical description in this chapter will show the interplay of structuring forces in the religious order. The shape of the local religious field is the result of processes in the international Catholic Church and in local structures and culture. Many actors are, consciously or unconsciously, active in the religious field. Individual, relatively small events at either level may have large consequences. In the previous chapter on the historical formation of the Catholic institution in Garanhuns and the parish of São Vicente, I described how the authorities in various ways introduced new elements into local Catholicism. On several occasions, the archives also revealed that attempts by the clergy to adapt the religious practices of the local population to prevalent ideological norms were not always successful - at least, not from the priests' point of view. The changes achieved with the cultural politics of the clergy were mostly only partial. Some practices found a following among the laity, while some did not and others did so only temporarily.

We can thus expect that the same will happen to the most recent campaign - the promotion of base communities and the implantation of a social activist interpretation of the gospel. In order to assess the influence of liberationist Catholicism at this local level, I will focus on the contemporary practices in the parish of São Vicente through a detailed description of the lay groups. The organization of the parish around the sacraments serves as a kind of basic structure, and helps one discover what place other practices have in the totality of the religious order. I will therefore pay special attention to the relation between the different groups and their respective relations with the priest and the basic activities in the parish. In this chapter, the collective organization of the parish is under examination, with an emphasis on the formation of groups and their subsequent activities. In later chapters, the roles, the mediating of ideas and significations, and the needs and desires of the actors connected to the groups will be analysed.

5.1 The parish as a subdivision of global Catholicism

The parish is the basic unit of the Catholic ecclesiastical structure. Whereas the Pope and the Roman Curia are responsible for the transnational Church, the bishop and his priests take care of the local Church. In this centralized model, the diocese is a juridical but also a geographical unit. The territory of a diocese is further divided into smaller areas, the parishes. By doing so, the bishop transfers to the priests some of his power and tasks, of which the distribution of the sacraments to the Catholics can be considered the most fundamental (cf. Oliveira 1990:934). The organization of the functions of the Church is therefore closely connected to the zoning of the territory of the diocese.

SUB-PARISHES

As a geographical unit, a parish is a nicely bounded field for the anthropologist - at least, that is what I thought before I got to Brazil. In practice, the picture proves to be somewhat more complicated because some parishes of the diocese Garanhuns are divided into two or more 'sub-parishes' (Comblin 1990:349), as it were, each with its own 'centre'. Thus part of the parish of São Vicente, which comprises six hundred square kilometres, is attached to an 'unofficial' parish comprising also parts of the parishes of Bom Conselho and Águas Belas. This *de facto* parish consists of the villages Paranatama, Saloá and Iati, and the many hamlets in that area, all of which can be reached via highway BR 423 if one heads southwest from Garanhuns towards Águas Belas and Itaíba, the westernmost parish in the diocese. Frei Jaime, the Franciscan friar who moved from Paranatama to the hamlet of *sítio* Alma, serves as parish priest. This means he celebrates the Sunday Mass in the chapels or houses¹ of the hamlets and villages in this area, and that he is responsible for all religious matters in the area. The bureaucratic handling of parish matters continues to be taken care of by the secretariat of the parish church in Colina in the town of Garanhuns. So, for example, a marriage can take place in any of the churches in Paranatama, Saloá or Iati, but the required documents must be obtained from Garanhuns. The remaining, larger part of the parish of São Vicente consists of the neighbourhoods on the northwest side of Garanhuns and the villages to the northwest, which can be reached by following the BR 424 towards Arcoverde. In everyday practice, this smaller part of the parish also functions more or less as two separate parishes, one centred around the seat in Colina, the other with the town of Caetés as its nucleus. Both areas are administered by padre Milton. This rather complicated situation is schematized in Map 2 (p. 84).

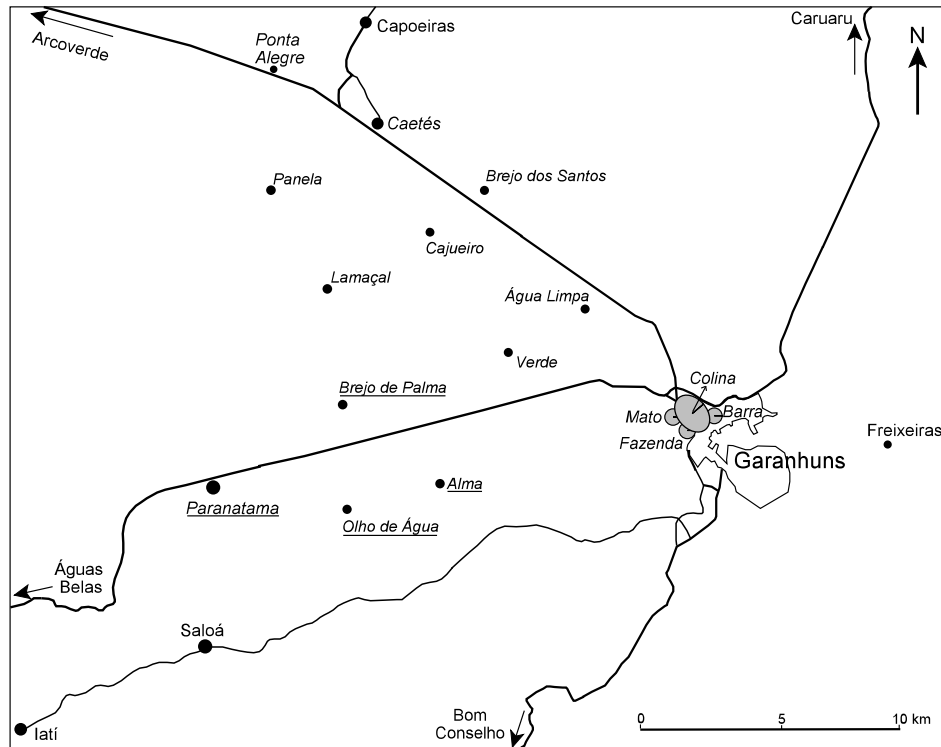
Apart from the church in Colina (the seat of the parish), the area has seven chapels. I have already mentioned two: the one in Paranatama and that in Caetés. Of the other five chapels, four are in the rural area: São Sebastião in *sítio* Verde, Nossa Senhora das Dores in Ponta Alegre, Santa Luzia in *sítio* Lameçal, and São Sebastião in *sítio* Panela. One chapel is located on the periphery of Garanhuns, in a neighbourhood called Mato. At the time of my research, the community of another urban neighbourhood - Fazenda - was trying to establish a chapel. The people had already chosen a patron saint and were looking for a suitable building. In all these chapels, the priest celebrates Mass once a month. The parish is predominantly rural. Only the municipality Garanhuns has a high urban population (86% of its 100,000+ inhabitants live in the urban zone). Caetés has 20,626 inhabitants, of whom more than 16,000 live in the rural zone (IBGE 1994).²

The practical division of the parish finds its rationale in the large distances between and the accessibility of villages and hamlets. However, the split into two sub-parishes is only possible because a priest is available to fulfil the tasks (i.e. the administration of the sacraments) in each one. In other words, the principal function of a parish remains intact and is dependent on the ecclesiastical officials. The division of the other part of

1 Not every hamlet possesses a chapel. Therefore, Masses are sometimes held in private houses or other buildings, such as stables.

2 Data refer to 1991. Paranatama village had only 1,100 inhabitants. More than 10,000 inhabitants of the municipality lived in the *sítios*. Saloá had almost 15,000 inhabitants, of whom little more than 4,000 lived in the village. For Iati, the numbers are a total of 18,586, of whom 5,431 are urban and 13,155 rural.

the parish can also be attributed to the distances involved. It corresponds, however, also to a great difference in the living conditions of the people. The part centred on the *matriz* in Colina is urban, while the part located nearer Caetés is distinctly rural in nature. As we shall see below, the difference between rural and urban has important consequences for the religious organization of the laity.



Map 2: Area of São Vicente's parish : All places in italic are part of the parish; italic and underlined belong to the *de facto* parish served by *Frei Jaime*.

COLINA AND BEYOND

Because I lived in Colina opposite the church and the house of Father Milton, the main area for my data collection became the two parts of the parish in which he worked. As a neighbour it was not difficult to keep up to date with the calendar of religious meetings and festivities; if I missed the priest, his housekeeper would inform me. Therefore, when I speak of the parish I mean this *de facto* parish. However, I often visited the other part, too, and frei Jaime became a friend who provided much information for this book. *Sítio Alma* and his house in this hamlet proved to be a nice place to relax and rest for a while whenever my research became too strenuous. Friar Jaime shares his house with two other Franciscan friars, and during my stay the house turned into a small 'seminary' where future Franciscans could spend a year 'living amongst the poor'. There was always somebody at home to offer me a cup of coffee and provide pleasant conversation, although

it was seldom *frei* Jaime himself. Various examples I use in later chapters come from the area administered by the Franciscan friars, and I will explicitly mention it when this is the case.

Besides the Franciscan friars and *padre* Milton, few religious agents live in the area of the parish. In the neighbourhood of Colina, the three nuns of the *pequena comunidade* take part in the activities of the parish.³ Because they have to work to earn their daily bread, however, they have little time available to do religious works in the parish, and *padre* Milton sometimes complained about that. Recently the oldest sister of the three retired from her teaching position and now dedicates her energy to a women's group in one of the poorest parts of Colina.

The boundaries of a parish are thus formed by ecclesiastical logic based on considerations of practical circumstances and the controllability of the administration of the sacraments. If in future fewer priests are available in the diocese, the 'sub-parish' of Paratama will cease to exist. The parishioners have no influence on these questions. For them, the parish is a factual unit. You belong to a parish because you live in a certain area and, whether you like it or not, if you are a Catholic you belong to this parish. There is no other option (cf. Comblin 1990:338). The parish can therefore be considered an objective structure, directing the religious organization of the population. The same can be said of the principal rituals offered by the institutional Catholic Church. These are covered in the next section.

5.2 Lay activities in the sacramental practice of the parish

Within the 'objective structure' of the parish, many options are available to the parishioners. Only a minority of Catholics take part in activities of the parish, apart from Mass and the main sacraments. As a Catholic living in a certain parish, one is free to choose whether or not to participate in its activities. More than a geographical, bureaucratic or arbitrary unit, a parish is the locus of certain activities and a specific community of people. What are these activities that make a parish a parish? Above, the professional religious agents were the point of departure. Here we turn to the lay religious agents. Lay people fulfil all kinds of tasks in the everyday routine of the parish, ranging from cleaning the church to organizing the feast of the patron saint. In this section, we will take a closer look at the parts played by these actors in the materialization of the religious in the parish.

MASS

Without doubt, the most visible and common activity of a parish is the Mass. This is also the activity most people participate in. However, the role of those attending Mass is mostly passive. The priest reads the Mass and does the preaching. The only parts that lay persons take part in are the readings from the scripture. In Colina there are two Masses on Sunday, one at eight in the morning and one at seven in the evening, and both attract so many people that most of the time there are not enough seats. Many people from the nearby hamlets attend the morning Mass, and then go on to the market. The Mass in the evening mainly attracts the young and people from the neighbourhood itself. In the afternoon Father

3 After I left Garanhuns, one Australian nun arrived in Caetés to live there.

Milton, says a Mass in Caetés.

Several smaller communities, both in town and in the rural area, have a Mass once a month on a weekday. In most chapels in the other parts of the parish in the countryside, the priest celebrates Mass once a year, usually at the feast of the patron saint of that community or on the occasion of a first communion or a confirmation. The ritual of confirmation can only be carried out by the bishop, and these visits by the head of the local Church to rural communities attract many people. However, not only these rare occasions attract large numbers: the infrequent event of a Mass being said by the priest also attracts multitudes from distant places.

Just like the incidental Masses in the countryside, the special feast days in the parish church attract large crowds. For example, the Ash Wednesday ritual draws many people. I seldom saw the church so full as on that day. This first day of Lent, after the fun and playfulness of carnival (and the many sins committed), evokes strong religious feelings in the Garanhunenses, or at least a need for ritual cleansing. The ritual itself is quite simple: the ashes⁴ are blessed and then some of it is strewn on each person's head in the shape of a cross, while the words "*convertei-vos e crede no Evangelho*" ("convert yourself and believe in the Gospel") are spoken. Up to this point, the ritual is little different from its Dutch counterpart, as I knew it in my childhood.⁵ However, at the end of Mass the church became total chaos, with people rushing to the altar to lay their hands on some of the ashes to take home. They give these to the sick who were unable to attend Mass, or save them for future situations of need. People strew the ashes around their house when bad weather is approaching, or to ward off evil in other situations.⁶

The chaos around the ashes was extreme, but overall the attitude of Catholics toward religious rituals and religious buildings is less formal than in many other countries. During Mass, people walk in and out without paying attention to the ritual, they talk with each other and children play in the aisles between the seats. All this is considered normal, but there are of course limits. A drunken man who entered one day at the moment of the Eucharist and shouted "Father, give me a piece, Father, give me a piece of the bread!" was evicted from the church. On a few other occasions, the priest asked the attention of some churchgoers who were talking loudly in the back, but this was exceptional.⁷

LAY MINISTERS

The priest is the only person allowed to perform the ritual of the Eucharist and to do the blessing, although lay people may carry out certain tasks related to the sacraments. These people are officially called *ministros* (ministers), but this word is seldom used in the parish. In Colina, there is a *pastoral do batismo*, a *pastoral do matrimônio* and a *pastoral dos doentes*. The first two take care of the preparation of parents and godparents who want a child to be baptized, and couples who want to get married, respectively. In both cases,

⁴ The ashes are the remains of palm branches, which were blessed on Palm Sunday the year before.

⁵ Although in the Netherlands one receives a cross on the forehead rather than on the top of the head.

⁶ Record 910213-216. However, it may be used for other purposes, too. In the midst of all the turmoil, the priest shouted that it was not meant to take to the *catimbozeiro*.

⁷ This often happened during a baptism or marriage. Perhaps this is because on such festive occasions, people who normally do not go to Mass are present. Once I saw the father of a child who was being baptized chatting with some other men at the back of the chapel. He was also smoking a cigarette. However, it seems that he considered his son's baptism an important enough reason to enter a church.

the ministers organize a course spread over three meetings. These courses are compulsory for all parishioners who want their child to be baptized or who want to get married.⁸ The ministers are prepared for this task in a course organized at the level of the diocese. The pastoral of the sick is not so much restricted to preparation for a sacrament, as it includes visiting the sick in the neighbourhood, perhaps bringing them some medicine or food, and praying with them. Some lay people are also authorized to take the Eucharist to the sick on Sundays. These same people also administer the extreme unction and say the last rites over the dying if the priest is not present.

Other groups linked to the everyday management of parish works are the confirmation team (*equipe do crisma*) and the catechetical team (*equipe catequética*). The first coordinates the courses to prepare people for confirmation. Usually the candidates are between fifteen and twenty years of age, though occasionally older people participate. The course takes several months, and often the group comes to function as a youth group with other activities in addition to the transfer of religious knowledge. Cleber, the leader of the group in Colina, is himself a high-school student. The catechetical team organizes the religious instruction for children, in order to prepare them for their first Communion.

The other team in the parish is the *equipe litúrgica* (liturgical team), which is involved with the preparation of the Masses and religious feasts in the parish. In practice, this means that one or two persons consult with the priest about the songs to be sung during Mass and, if there is enough time, they rehearse them before the celebration starts. On special feast days, they may also coordinate the participation of (for instance) the CEBs in the celebration of Mass.

THE COUNCIL

All these groups are accountable to the priest, although most operate quite independently and are supervised more by the social control of members of the different groups than by the priest. In this sense, the management of the parish is a collective endeavour. This principle of organization is also expressed in the *conselho paroquial* (parish council), which consists of six to eight volunteers who meet on a regular basis in order to discuss and decide matters of the parish, ranging from the planning of religious activities to financial aspects and the maintenance of the buildings. This council was installed more or less at the time of my arrival in the parish, and the priest chose the members from among the various pastoral groups, in order to have all groups represented in it. In Paranatama, Father Jaime established a similar group, but he called it a parochial coordination team (*coordenação paroquial*) because he thinks that is more democratic. He told me that:

A council is for consultation, the priest asks advice but he takes the decision. In the coordination there is equality in positions, and they take the decisions through votes: the proposal that gets most votes wins.⁹

8 For many people this is a reason to go to other parishes (outside the diocese) for baptism and marriage. Recall the Mayor of Caetés mentioned in Chapter 3, who refused to do the course. According to Comblin (1990:342), this is a form of resistance against the clerical interference in the religious.

9 Interview 900502-52 : "O conselho é consultivo, o padre consulta, mas a decisão é dele. Na coordenação há uma igualdade de posições, onde a decisão é através de uma eleição, a proposta que tiver o maior número de votos ganha." Although Father Jaime says his system is more democratic, his words also reveal the relativity of this democracy. "Because we are in transition from the old habits to a new system, we wanted to be sure we would have some confidential persons in the *conselho*, so we, the friars, nominated some and the others were elected by the people." (*Mas como estamos em fase de transição de um regime antigo, tradicionalista para um novo sistema, então a gente quis assegurar*

I was never invited to the meetings of the council,¹⁰ but I heard quite a few - often negative - comments about its functioning. Father Milton complained about the parishioners lack of interest in volunteering. He had often asked for volunteers during Mass, but no-one had volunteered. In the end, he had personally invited the persons he thought would be suitable for the task. However, he was not content with his choices and thought some members of the council did not have the abilities he had expected. Some members of the council complained about the lack of information on principal affairs (especially financial matters) furnished by the priest, and accused other members of gossiping. Involved outsiders complained that the council was not elected and was made up only of uncritical people. These voices suggest that the council is not functioning as it should, and that may be the reason why the priest never invited me to attend a meeting.¹¹ However, neither did any of the lay members of the council. I discussed this matter with some of them and they all thought this was up to the priest. This indicates his power within the council. As far as I know, nobody brought the question up in a council meeting.

So much for the activities in the parish connected to the basic functions of the parish, i.e. the administration of the sacraments and the church fabric, and under direct control of the priest. Although all the other lay activities are related to the parish and the priest, they are less strictly connected to the ordinary, everyday organization of parish life. Some lay groups perform certain tasks integrated in the wider religious organization, but all have a more independent status compared to the *equipes* and *pastorais*.

5.3 The base communities

The religious agents of the diocese consider base communities to be the most important form of lay activity in the parish, both in town and in the countryside. Most lay people participating in a lay group are in fact members of one of the many evangelization groups, or base communities. The CEBs are the result of the liberationist campaign and the most recently established form of lay association.

URBAN COMMUNITIES

In town, people mostly use the word 'evangelization', whereas in the countryside people speak of their 'community'. However, these words are not used in a strict sense. The 'community' of the hamlets in the rural zone as used by the people refers not only to the people participating in the religious meetings, but often to all inhabitants in the area. When the word 'community' is used in the urban context in reference to the religious, it can mean both the members of the evangelization group and the whole neighbourhood. For the urban groups, the priest also uses the phrase *grupos de ponto de rua* (street-corner groups), but I never heard other people use it.

The groups in town have between ten and fifteen members. They all live near each

umas pessoas de confiança dentro do conselho, então nós irmãos nomeamos alguns, e outros foram eleitos pelo povo").

¹⁰ One time I just popped in. See Chapter 6, p. 119. On that occasion, the organization of the feast for the patron saint was discussed.

¹¹ A more malicious interpretation could be that Father Milton had something to hide, as some lay commentaries suggested. In Chapter 7 I will go more deeply into the questions of authority and democracy connected to these observations.

other and meet once a week in the house of one of the participants. One or two lay persons direct the groups, and most of the time they use the *roteiro* provided by the diocesan coordination team. In this manual, texts from the Bible are suggested or sometimes reproduced with examples of discussion themes and suggestions for appropriate prayers. The structure for the meetings proposed in the manual is the same *ver, julgar, agir* (see, judge, act) method used at the diocesan assembly.

Marisa is the leader of one of the two groups in the Rua Arcoverde. Her group - which is made up of a fairly fixed circle of persons - meets every Thursday evening. At seven, the participants start to arrive, and fifteen minutes later Marisa opens the meeting with a prayer and they all sing a song. She then reads the text from the *roteiro* on the theme of the evening, and tries to provoke a discussion. However, most participants prefer to listen rather than speak. Another participant reads the fragment of the Bible and Marisa then explains it, relating it to the here and now. This time, other participants give their interpretation. The most fervour, however, is aroused by the songs and prayers. The base community of Marisa is known for its animation. They all love to sing. Therefore, people who are not regular participants sometimes invite the group to hold the meeting at their house. Especially the months of May (with a *novena* for Our Lady) and December (when the *novena de Natal* is organized) are outstanding occasions for this. The pleasant and happy reputation of this evangelization group may attract new members, but these are always acquaintances. Because the meeting is held at a different location each week, finding out where the next is to be held is not easy unless one has already attended one. Since the group is small and the meetings are in private houses, entering unnoticed is impossible. This goes for the anthropologist as well as for interested outsiders, who might prefer to observe some meetings before deciding to participate regularly. However, the invitations to the houses of non-members show that the fame of the CEB goes beyond the direct circle of the regular participants.

Another evangelization group in Colina is that of the rua da Baraca. This street is one of the poorest in the whole neighbourhood, with houses balanced on the edge of an open sewer many metres deep. The evangelization group here is the initiative of Alberto, one of the most active laymen in the parish. He does not live in this part of the neighbourhood but decided to start a group in this street because he thinks it is the very poor who should organize and use the inspiration of the Bible to work to better their situation. In the meetings he reads biblical texts and tries to provoke discussion and reflection, first of all on the bad living conditions of the participants. Alberto's aim is to stir the people up and counsel the group for a while. After that, a member of the group living in that part of the neighbourhood will take over the leadership. Since the group is new and inexperienced, the people participating have not yet formed a close and stable group, even though they know each other by sight as they all live nearby. They are also not yet accustomed to the style of worship practised in a meeting of an evangelization group, and most treat Alberto with much respect and regard him as a religious specialist of high standing. As a visitor, they treated me likewise, which made me feel quite uncomfortable with the situation. We all became rather shy. It is difficult to say whether it was my presence, the attitude of Alberto (about which I will say more later) or the inexperience of the participants, but the contribution of the people in the discussions was limited and the affair seemed to be more a class given by Alberto than a meeting of Catholics who had assembled

in order to praise God and discuss the meaning of His presence in everyday life.

These are just two examples of the many meetings of the tenevangelization groups in Colina. Of course, each group has its own peculiarities and specialties. I presented here the groups of Marisa and Alberto because they represent some of the major differences between groups - differences closely connected to the structure of the group and the personality of the leaders. In the next chapter I will come back to this. For now it is important to ascertain that at least the form of organization in small base communities has found following in the urban part of the parish.

Apart from the weekly meetings, the members of the urban communities usually have no joint activities. Some may participate in other lay groups or activities, such as visiting the sick, but they do not do this as a group. Especially the leaders of the evangelization groups often have other activities in the parish. For example, Marisa is also a member of the *conselho paroquial*, and Alberto often acts as a representative of the local communities at the meetings of the diocese or even regional and national gatherings.

The number of base communities in the urban part of the parish can change considerably within a short period of time. When I first visited Colina in 1989, I was told that there were more than thirty CEBs, due to a recent *missão popular* (popular mission) carried out by two Redemptorist friars a few months earlier. This *missão* is an event where two priests work for two weeks in a parish, preaching to and praying with the people of the communities in all parts of the neighbourhood. The Redemptorist friars tried to draw the parishioners into religious activity through intensive preaching in the whole community. They developed a special *novena*: nine nights of praying by groups of nine households, rotating from one house to the other. The aim was to involve the people in liberationist Catholicism.

The Redemptorist friars are not the only religious actors that organize missions. In the Northeast, the missions of the Capuchin *frei* Damião are very well known, too. *Frei* Damião died in 1997 - at the age of 98 - but he travelled throughout the region to perform *santas missões* (holy missions) from 1931, when he arrived in Brazil, almost until his death. The aim of his work was to deliver the people of the *sertão* from the demon, "that tries to deviate people from the Church" (Maurício, Cirano and Almeida 1977:18). *Frei* Damião concentrated on moral questions in his preachings. He urged his listeners to have their marriage blessed in the church, and to end extramarital relations. "A person who lives with others without marriage will be in hell upside down" (Maurício, Cirano and Almeida 1977:20). His advice also concerned everyday conduct, such as the wearing of trousers by women: "For you there is a place set apart very deep in hell" (Maurício, Cirano and Almeida 1977:20). The sermons of *frei* Damião always attracted large crowds and people ascribed miraculous powers to him.

Father Milton prefers the popular missions carried out by the Redemptorist friars. Various people told me that the Redemptorists succeeded in stirring up interest in religious matters and that large crowds were present at the plenary meetings. However, after the missionaries left, the religious fervour soon evaporated - as suggested by the numbers of functioning evangelization groups. During my stay in Colina, only ten groups met on a regular basis. Without counting the temporary revivals as the result of these missions, we nevertheless can safely state that in the urban part of the parish roughly a hundred

Catholics are involved in CEBS.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

The meetings of base communities in the countryside follow the same pattern as those in the urban area do. The meeting of the community of Brejo dos Santos on a Saturday afternoon in August 1990 opened with the invocation of the help of the Holy Spirit. Olívia then introduced the theme of the month. It was the vocation, *chamado de Deus*, and the *roteiro* contains a text on the many ways God may call people. The *roteiro* also suggests a passage from the Bible, but Olívia had forgotten to bring one with her, so she gave a few examples she knew by heart. After that she read the propositions put forward in the *roteiro*, connecting the theme of the vocation to everyday life. Although few people were present, a lively discussion started on the vocation of women, upbringing and the fact that men do not know how to work in the house. After an hour, the meeting ended with prayers.

The diocesan coordination team prepares different contributions in the *roteiro* for the rural groups and for the urban groups, since the circumstances in which people live are different. Thus, special texts treating aspects of the rural reality are made for groups like the one of Olívia. In the Saturday afternoon meeting of the community of Brejo dos Santos, they discussed the upcoming elections to the syndicate of rural workers rather than the lack of a sewer system in the neighbourhood.

Another difference between rural and urban groups is that the former are usually larger than the latter. Several explanations can be given for this. In the first place, rural communities are 'natural communities', as *padre* Milton explained to me. People know each other and many will have lived in the same hamlet for generations, and this creates a bond between them. In the second place, life in the countryside does not offer many diversions: there are no televisions and people do not have access to modern information systems. A meeting of the base community is not only a serious religious obligation, but also an occasion to have fun and hear the latest gossip. In the third place, there are very few other religious happenings in the rural area, so the meeting of the evangelization group becomes the only occasion during the week for collective religious celebration outside the household. The fact that few people attended the meeting in Brejo dos Santos, for example, was explained by the festivities in honour of the patron saint of Caetés. Many people of the community went in to town that day, something they do not do every Saturday.

The fourth and probably most important reason for base communities to be larger in the countryside is the monopoly of the community on religious organization. In a context where almost everybody calls him or herself a Catholic, this is an important fact. Religious activities that in town are unconnected because different groups organize them, in the rural area are connected with the community. Catechism and the preparation classes for confirmation or baptism are part of the activities of the base community. Earlier I stated that one cannot choose a parish because one belongs to a parish when one lives within its territory. In the rural area the same can be said of the base community, since generally the same persons that form the core of the evangelization group are the leaders of, for instance, the *equipe catequética* or offer preparation classes. Comblin (1990:340) calls these rural communities *quase-paróquias* (quasi-parishes). "Just like the parish, the community is a compulsory intervention: it has the monopoly of religious services. Whoever

wants these services has to pass through the community."

In many rural communities, it is not only the religious services that are monopolized. rural base communities also have other activities and this may be the fifth and last reason for the greater commitment to these groups in the rural zone as compared to the urban ones. The most common of the non-religious activities is the *banco de sementes* (communal seed-bank). The community owns beans and every farmer receives, for instance, ten kilos to plant. After the harvest, they return the twenty kilos, unless there has been no harvest due to drought. These twenty kilos are the property of the community and remain locked up in the *banco de sementes* until they are planted the following winter, when one can introduce a new member to use half of one's twenty kilos. The base communities establish most seed banks in the area, often on the initiative of the priest and with financial help from the parish, although the governmental organ for agricultural information (EMATER-PE) also helps rural communities to create them. Most communities also have a *caixa comunitária* (communal fund) with which to buy the first seeds (as well as candles for religious services and other items of communal interest).

Some base communities develop other communal activities besides the seed bank. Several groups managed to set up a *casa de farinha*, a mill to make manioc flour. In the area of Paranatama, the base communities of Olho de Água and Brejo de Palma managed in the 1980s to initiate a water system, as we saw in the previous chapter. The community of Água Limpa was doing so at the time of my research. In these cases, they need substantial financial resources that the members of the groups do not have - and nor does the parish or the diocese. Therefore, the people have to seek the assistance of governmental organizations, politicians or other (foreign) agencies. It will be no surprise that such projects meet with many difficulties and constraints. I will return to this aspect of the practice of base communities in Chapter 7. For now it is important to realize that these activities of rural base communities can (partly) explain the involvement of more people as compared to urban groups. Meetings that have the seed bank on the agenda are attended by many more people than attend 'ordinary' religious meetings. Olívia said only six families always attend, and the members of about fifteen other families attend now and then, while the remaining part of the community does not participate at all or only on the occasion of special events.

INDEPENDENCE

Both the urban and the rural base communities operate independently from the parish. Occasionally the priest visits the groups, but normally not more than once or twice a year. Father Milton, however, supervises the leaders of the communities more regularly. Every month there is a meeting for all *evangelizadores* of the parish, in order to evaluate the work done and organize matters for the coming month. One such meeting is held in Colina, another one Caetés, again reflecting the difference between urban and rural evangelization. Most of the time the priest participates in these meetings. Father Milton also started a Bible course in Colina in 1990. To prepare the laity for its task of evangelization and *conscientização* the priest, with the help of Margarida (one of the nuns of the *pequena comunidade*) lectures in the parish on liberation theology every Friday night. In the classes of this so-called *escolinha de fé* (literally: small school of belief), they stress the link between the biblical texts and everyday life, as well as the consequences of being a Catholic for

community life. Beyond these meetings for the leaders of base communities, the groups function without supervision and the priest seldom visits the CEBs in Colina and the rural area. Of course, there are informal contacts. Before or after Mass people can have private conversations with the priest or go to his house.

The priest encourages the people of base communities to develop community projects beyond the strictly religious sphere. *Padre Milton* is one of the most fervent advocates of the 'preferential option for the poor' of the diocese, and he tries to put into practice the guidelines set out by the diocesan assembly. He chooses to direct his attention to the (formation of) evangelization groups or CEBs. However, in his opinion, not all CEBs are real CEBs, because a real CEB presupposes political action, in party politics or syndicates. Thus, during Mass he calls on people to participate in the groups, and in his sermons he often includes social problems. Not all his parishioners appreciate this attitude, but I will return to this later.

Since the CEBs form the main aim of diocesan policy and the work of Father Milton in the parish, it sometimes looks as though they *are* the parish.¹² For many Catholic celebrations, the priest relies on the CEBs to organize Church life in the parish. Some active CEB leaders are also members of the parish council, participate in various ministries and act as readers during Mass. This all adds to the impression that CEBs (or at least the members) are the backbone of the parish structure. The effort of the clergy and diocesan policy to create a new structure of lay organization based on small local groups has had clear results in the parish. However, the CEBs have not fully replaced other groups: these also fulfil important tasks in the religious organization of the parish. We will now turn our attention to these.

5.4 The Apostleship of Prayer

An established event in the Catholic routine of the parish takes place at night on every first Friday of the month, when the *Apostolado da Oração* holds its monthly meeting in the parish church. Recognizing the members of this group is easy because they wear a red ribbon with a medal of Our Lady - the *fita* - over their clothes. They also wear a white blouse or white sweater, although some wear a coat because of the cold (and wear the ribbon over the coat). The only male member of the association does not have to wear white clothes, or bear the *fita*. Instead, he has a small red ribbon around his arm. Members also use these paraphernalia during processions or at other religious festivities.

The group of Colina is not very large: it has only fifty-three members. Most are long-time participants in the activities of the Apostleship of Prayer and have known each other for years. The monthly meeting is held in order to pray together; ideally, the priest will say a Mass. The meetings consist of two parts. The first includes praying and singing, and when the priest is available also a Holy Mass. This Mass is open to everyone, but because of the ribbons one can always pick out the members of the Apostleship. The second part is the reunion of the group, where they discuss their other activities. This starts with

¹² This is exactly the subject of much discussion among liberation theologians and others involved in the ideological construction of CEBs. Some would like to see the Catholic base communities as 'being Church', or otherwise replacing the traditional parishes. I will not engage in this discussion (see Van der Ploeg 1991, Oliveira 1990, Comblin 1987).

a roll-call, which is followed by the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting. The president then says a few words on the importance of the work of the group in the parish. She announces the name of any member who is sick and asks for prayers to be said for that person. The group also acknowledges members' birthdays. The president then asks everyone what good works they plan to do in the parish in the coming month. Later, it is easy to check whether they have actually done those good works by reading the minutes.

WORK OF THE APOSTOLADO

The works done by members of the Apostleship of Prayer in the parish are threefold. First, they care for their sick co-residents of the neighbourhood. This task consists of visiting the sick at home or in hospital. The members of the Apostleship provide some food or medicine, if possible, and pray and show compassion for them. Secondly, the *Apostolado da Oração* renders most of the practical services to the parish, in comparison to the other groups. They are responsible for the cleaning of the church, including the images of saints and the pictures, benches, candlesticks, jars and all the other ornaments and utensils, and wash the altar cloth and the priest's robes. They also open the church in the afternoon so that passers-by can have a moment of meditation in the church, which is closed most of the time. This last task is a recent addition to the others. Another innovation is the monthly procession held at six in the morning on a Friday. After the last popular mission of the Redemptorist friars, the members of the Apostleship felt a need to do something to maintain the religious fervour. According to Father Milton, the first proposal was to organize a *caminhada* (penitentiary procession) every week. He, however, thought that sustaining such a ritual would be very difficult. They therefore decided to hold it once a month. So now every first Friday of the month (the same day the Apostleship meets in the evening) a group of thirty to forty praying and singing people crosses the neighbourhood, from the church to the monumental cross at the top of the hill and back.

To become a member of the Apostleship, one has to have a good reputation. However, as can be expected, this notion is difficult to grasp. From the discussions on the topic, I deduced that the most important criteria were marital state and honesty, i.e. members should be officially married and should not lie or engage in gossip. However, these guidelines are difficult to maintain in Colina. Many people do not have a neatly organized life including a marriage certificate, and according to Father Milton this should be no reason to banish these people from the Church. The president of the group feels she cannot reprimand her co-members, although other members of the parish have criticized her for this reserve.

The group is parish based. No umbrella organization at the level of the diocese exists, and thus the voice of the *Apostolado* is often absent from assemblies or other diocesan meetings. Caetés and Paranatama also have a group, as does *sítio Verde*, but even at the level of the parish these groups do not maintain contacts. All this contributes to the relative invisibility of the group within the religious structure. Even wearing the *fita* does not alter this situation very much. The low estimation of the priests only adds to this state of affairs.

SMOOTH INTEGRATION

Although father Milton admits the members of the Apostleship of Prayer do necessary work in the parish, he does not hold the group in much esteem. Other liberationist priests share this opinion. They consider the Apostleship a relic from the past that does not quite fit in with the contemporary project of liberationist Catholicism. However, since the group has its own demarcated task, it is left in peace. In fact, the work of the Apostleship has advantages for the priest: someone has to take care of the maintenance of the church building and fittings, and it is handy for him to have an approachable group to do so.

The result is a smooth integration in the structure of the organization of the parish. This is interesting, all the more so if we take into account that only twelve years ago the priest of the day banned the Apostleship. However, very few participants seemed to remember this episode of the history of their group. They picked up the thread and continued as before. The campaign to promote liberationist ideology did not disturb the continuity of the religious practices of the members of the *Apostolado da Oração*.

5.5 The charismatic prayer group

Besides the groups resulting from earlier campaigns, new groups emerge without being promoted by the diocese, as happened with the charismatic prayer groups. On Monday evenings, the church of São Vicente in Colina is the scene of an unusual happening - at least, it is unusual for Catholics who are unaccustomed to ecstatic expressions and experiences of belief.

CHARISMATIC PRAYER

The charismatic prayer meeting held on a Monday evening in August 1990 contained all aspects that bring about the feeling of unease many parishioners feel when they come into contact with it. Although the meeting was due to start at seven-thirty, quite a few people turned up at seven to rehearse the songs. When most people had arrived, the meeting began with the profession of faith - the 'I believe' - followed by three Hail Marys and the Lord's Prayer. The woman leading the meeting then said a personal prayer, which was followed by more Hail Marys. After this opening, the Holy Spirit was invoked, in much the same way as is done in the meeting of the base community in Brejo dos Santos. However, for the participants of this meeting, this invocation was a much more central part.

About half the meeting was dedicated to a sort of meditation on the powers of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Prayers murmured with closed eyes and a hand on the shoulder of the nearest person were alternated with the song that has the words "Holy Spirit that descends like fire".¹³ After some time, other songs were introduced and one of the leaders started to pray louder. Keywords in her personal prayer were jealousy, anger, sin and rivalry. Some people around me started to snifle or cry. The atmosphere became charged, and things reached a climax when everybody called out the good that the Holy Spirit brings: love, happiness and peace.

The mood then changed abruptly and became festive, everybody singing happy songs

13 "Espírito Santo que desce como fogo."

about the power of God and the gospel. One song was even accompanied by a dance. Every verse ends with "Like this, like this, like this one praises God"¹⁴, and people make different bodily movements, such as waving their hands in the air or jumping up and down. After this exercise there followed a song about listening to the Word of God, as an introduction to the reading from the Scripture. As is usual, the text from the Bible concerned an episode of the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Roberto then explained the passage, and this induced him to call on those present to let the Holy Spirit transform their hearts. "You will never get enough of praising the Lord, because only Jesus is the solution to your problems and illness." In this manner, the members of the Charismatic movement explain the reading from the Scripture in terms of their everyday life. Here, people themselves receive attention. They love, they encounter problems and have to take care of their families and community, and God will help them if they help Him (cf. Benedetti 1988:252). The concluding amen invoked applause. Roberto continued, "Clap your hands louder, louder, for Jesus." Verónica took over: "We didn't come here for nothing, we are looking for Jesus, to exalt ourselves to return home renovated, that is the wish of Jesus."¹⁶ A very cheerful song called 'My God Lives'¹⁷ was then sung.

After this euphoria, it was time for the more mundane aspects of religious life: the collection, and the announcement of Charismatic events in town, such as a play staged at the college of Santa Sofia in the centre of town. Before ending the meeting with the Lord's Prayer and a Hail Mary, they sang more songs and Verónica started telling a story to testify the presence of God. She said that while she was attending one of the annual seminars that are organized in order to deepen charismatic faith she had a dream¹⁸ that took her to a woods full of serpents. However, her faith allowed her to pass through it unharmed, and on the other side she found a beautiful spot. There was a house and lots of lovely flowering plants. Then a woman appeared and gave her one of the plants. Verónica promised she would look after it. She then concluded: "It was not until later that I realized this plant was Jesus."

UNUSUAL CATHOLICISM

When I started this description, I used the word 'unusual' and that is precisely the sensation one gets when one attends a meeting of the charismatic prayer group for the first time. This sensation is felt not only by the unprepared anthropologist with a Catholic Dutch upbringing, but also by the Brazilian Catholics who do not (yet) know the culture of the Charismatic Renewal Movement. They say it is something *esquisita* - curious or strange. Many people told me they were surprised and felt uncomfortable, and so did I. Outsiders would tell me "this is something Pentecostal-like", an expression that reveals much Catholic mistrust. However, the special style of the charismatic prayer group is closely connected to its central belief in the presence of God in the lives of people, and in the power of the Holy Spirit to perform miracles. As such, it is the core of existence of the Charismatic Renewal Movement and the more people get used to it, the more they appreciate it.

14 "Assim, assim, assim é que se louva Deus."

15 This time it is Matthew 17:1-9.

16 "... Que a gente se levanta, que voltamos para casa renovado ...".

17 "Meu Deus está vivo."

18 She uses the word *elevação*, which literally means 'elevation'.

The leaders of the prayer meetings are aware of the confusion their way of worship generates in newcomers and therefore pay special attention to visitors. On most occasions, those who are participating for the first time are welcomed at a certain moment in the meeting, and receive handshakes and hugs from the regular participants. The leaders also give clear examples of the expected behaviour during the meeting, for instance, the gestures accompanying certain songs. As people start to feel comfortable in the group, they begin to imitate the gestures the leader makes. Staying attentive to the reactions the Holy Spirit brings about in individual participants is important for the leaders of the group (Benedetti 1988:244). Rosa, one of the leaders of the group, explained that during the weekly prayer meetings in the parish of São Vicente they avoid having manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as the *dom de línguas* (gift of tongues, glossolalia), which are even more unconventional for ordinary Catholics. They control these typical manifestations of Charismatic Renewal. "You have to know when to use it"¹⁹ as Rosa put it, to prevent the association with Pentecostal Christianity, which would scare off potential members. The more experienced members of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in Garanhuns go to the 'closed' prayer meetings in the college of Santa Sofia - which is a misnomer because these meetings are fully open to the manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In practice, the leaders of the local prayer group do not always succeed in eluding the strong manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is common for participants to start to cry during the prayers, and this sometimes takes on a rather hysterical form. At one meeting, this happened to Yvone. During the meditation she started to cry and was unable to stop. At first nobody paid attention to it, but some time later while Socorro was explaining the reading from the Scripture, Yvone's cries became audible to all present. Socorro commented "It is the devil, he wants to leave her", and continued her preaching. By then, Yvone was completely out of control and disturbing the regular programme of the meeting. Rosa went to her and took her to the sacristy in order to talk to her and calm her down. By the end of the meeting, Yvone was exhausted but also relieved and she said she felt much better.

About thirty people were present when the meeting in August 1990 I described above started, but later ten more turned up. The group has quite a turnover. Each time they meet, new people come to see what the Charismatic Renewal is all about. Since the meetings are held in the church at a fixed time (Monday evenings) and with the doors open, peeking inside is quite easy for interested outsiders. Overall, the popularity of the charismatic prayer group seems to fluctuate, as people told me that there were times when eighty to a hundred people participated in the meeting, whereas I never counted more than about sixty. A reason for this decline or fluctuation might be that most young people go to school in the evening, so they cannot participate in the meetings. Another explanation participants often offered is the general attitude of people; that is, people are not "interested in hearing of God."

LAY INDEPENDENCE

Compared with all the groups discussed so far, the charismatic prayer group has a special

19 Interview 910405-260 / sheet 12-12 vº: "Usa, muito pouco. E usa assim: quem tem, bem baixinha. (...). Usar com prudência, saber quando usar. Os dons também são controláveis."

place in the everyday life of the parish. Whereas the base communities and the devotional groups act within the parish and have their role in the parish organization, the *Renovação* is organized independently of the parishes. At the level of the diocese, a coordinating committee organizes the more important meetings (for example, at Pentecost) and maintains contact with the groups in the parishes. Individual members may perform other tasks in the parishes, such as the catechism, but not as official representatives of the Charismatic Renewal Movement. Nevertheless, the members of the local prayer group do engage in many activities in the parish. A considerable number of them take part in the pastorate of the sick, for example.

The *Renovação Carismática Católica* was introduced in Garanhuns in 1979, by a layman who had become familiar with it while hospitalized in Recife. The promotion of this lay movement is in no way part of any campaign in the diocese. At a higher level, national or international, the Charismatic Movement is of course promoted by laymen and clergy. This means the cultural politics are not univocal. Different campaigns are at work simultaneously. Although they can clash, the result can also be peaceful coexistence, as the situation in Garanhuns suggests. For ten years, the Charismatic Movement had functioned in Garanhuns without support from the local clergy. It attracted increasing numbers people, and became a significant part of the religious order. One reason for the growth of the movement may be that it does not encounter strong opposition from the clergy.

Their own concerns constrain religious specialists in their attempts to carry out their liberationist campaign: all priests agree that having a Charismatic Renewal within the Church is better than losing the faithful to the Pentecostal churches in town. Father Milton also showed a pragmatic attitude in this matter. Once he confided to me: "By joining them once in a while you can keep an eye on them and try to influence them." Now and then he attends a prayer meeting and uses the opportunity to introduce a more liberationist discourse into the group.

I did not see any hostility against the charismatic groups at the level of the parishes and neighbourhoods, either. Only a few members and leaders of the lay groups are conscious of the pronounced opposition depicted in the national media. Some CEB members see the charismatic prayer groups as a form of alienation that draws Catholics away from the struggle for a better world. Others, however, are impressed with the appeal and fervour of the charismatics. One leader of a CEB expressed her admiration of a member of the movement thus: "He is so Catholic!" The *Renovação Carismática Católica* had become part of the religious order by 1990. This presence of the charismatic prayer group in the parish shows that the laity can push forward their own plans and goals at the local level.

5.6 The foundation of the Legion of Mary

The foundation of the *Legião de Maria* offers an even more powerful example of the headstrong ways of the laity. One Wednesday afternoon in May, Marisa invited me to a meeting at the church. She told me they had started a new group and that I would like it.

MORE INITIATIVES

When we arrived at the church, the first thing Marisa did was set up a small altar: a table covered with a white cloth with the words *Legio Mariae* stamped on it. She placed on it an image of Mary she had brought with her, a vase of flowers and a burning candle. She then arranged the stools in a circle around this altar. Soon, fourteen women had arrived. Formally, the maximum for a *presidium* (as they call a local branch of the movement) is twelve. Above this number, the group must split up. However, all members present agreed that this is an odd and unnecessary rule, and continued as one group.

The routine of the meetings is prescribed in a leaflet, which also contains the prayers. Marisa also has a manual with so-called spiritual readings. The set-up was reminiscent of the meeting of the *Apostolado da Oração*, because here they also read the minutes of the previous meeting. However, they more explicitly control the tasks of each participant. Moreover, in comparison with the Apostleship of Prayer, the tasks the members must fulfill are different. While the purpose of the *Apostolado* is to maintain the church and visit the sick, the primary goal of the *Legião de Maria* is to engage in door-to-door evangelization. It seems that they had quickly translated this general task into a concrete one, as Marisa explained a few months later:

It is almost the same [compared with the *Apostolado*], but the *Legião* goes further. It searches for the unmarried couples. Because there are many couples who only live together, you know. They never bothered marrying, because nobody helped them or explained about marriage. What it means. (...) This is the goal of the work of the *Legião de Maria*.²⁰

She looked a little embarrassed when she told me this. In answer to my question whether everyone was fulfilling this task, she apologized. They were only just starting and for the time being were limiting their work to visiting the sick. Soon they found out, however, that visiting the sick in the manner of the *Legião* was different, too. Legionaries visit sick people and pray for them, but they are not allowed to give food or clothes. They are not permitted to perform charitable acts. In the eyes of the women, this was pure nonsense: if people are hungry, you should offer them food, was their opinion.

REBELLIOUS DEVOTEES

The initiative for the foundation of a chapter of the Legion of Mary in the parish came from a woman (whose name Marisa had forgotten) from another neighbourhood - São Sebastião - where there was already a Legion. Although some women were interested,

20 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 9: "É quase idêntico. Só que o... a *Legião* ainda vai mais além, né. A *Legião* procura saber dos casais que não tem matrimônio, né. Porque tem muitas pessoas que vivem só juntas, né. E não se dedicam a si casarem, porque nunca houve uma mãozinha, ou senão uma pessoa que explicasse. O que significava o matrimônio, né. (...) É, esse trabalho da *Legião* de Maria tem esse fim, né."

none was literate so they asked Marisa to become president of the group. To begin with she was reluctant, but in the end took on the task. However, she first asked the opinion of Father Milton. He replied that they were free to use the church but that he had no time to help them. He asked her to wait a while so he could think about it. When the women said they did not want to wait any longer, he consented to the foundation of the group, repeating, however, that he would have little time to help them. So they started. Every Wednesday afternoon, the women came together in the church. Again we see how the initiative of the laity can develop into routines. However, the Legion of Mary was not as successful as the Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Less than six months after the founding of the *presidium*, the group collapsed. The indignation about the prohibition on charity work was decisive. They collected money at every meeting but were not allowed to spend it on food for the sick. They were supposed to hand it over to the coordinating group in the other parish, who "took it to I don't know where", as Joanina, one of the participants said.²¹ She continued:

The money of these people [Legion of Mary] was to help nobody. The poor guy could die, the money was not taken out of that pocket, you know. What's the use?²²

Another woman from the Boa Vista group came to a meeting in São Vicente to clarify the rules again, but this only caused more confusion. She used the word 'spirituality' a lot in her exposition of the goal of the Legion. However, the women did not understand her correctly and thought she was talking about spiritism. Around this time, Father Milton also attended a meeting. He explained he did not think there was much future for the group. This spelled the end of the group in the parish.

5.7 The limits of the ideological campaign

The recent campaign of liberationist Catholicism profoundly changed the religious structure of the Catholicism of the parish of São Vicente. A new model of organization for the laity was introduced, and in both the urban neighbourhoods and the rural area people started to participate in CEBs. The new structure did not, however, totally replace the old forms of lay organization.²³ Specially in the urban part of the parish, at least half of the participants of lay groups are in fact a member of groups other than the CEBs. Among the most favourite lay groups is the Charismatic Renewal group, which is not encouraged by the town's clergy. In the dynamic process of organizing the religious in the parish, the laity are not a powerless flock, simply submitting to the campaigns of the clergy.

21 Interview 910321-256 / sheet 11: "*levava não sei para onde.*"

22 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 13: "*o dinheiro desse povo não era para ajudar ninguém. O nego podia morrer, o dinheiro não era tirado daquela mochila, né. O que adiantava?*"

23 In this overview of the organization of the parish I have left aside the *Sociedade de São Vicente de Paula* (Society of Saint Vincent de Paula), or as they are called in Catholic circles, the *Vicentinos*. In São Vicente this group was very low profile. At the time of my research, the local group had broken up, although a few people continued with the work. One person who says he is a *Vicentino* is Seu Paulo. He explained to me that the *Vicentinos* are "dedicated to love for the poor" and make payments on behalf of the *Sociedade de São Vicente de Paula* for some old people in the asylum, in order for them "to have at least a coffin without having to humiliate themselves." (Interview 900528-70 / sheet 14: "*Pelo menos isso a pessoa tem, seu caixãozinho, sem está se humilhando a ninguém, a Sociedade é que paga.*") Another project was the construction of a house, bit by bit and in *mutirão*. This proceeded, however, very slowly because the means to buy the materials were lacking. Despite these efforts of Seu Paulo, meetings were no longer held, and it appeared to me that the projects carried out were a sort of private enterprise. However, it remains difficult to assess whether the situation is very different from what it used to be.

One aspect of liberationist ideology - the democratization of the organization of the parish - resulted in more than the founding of CEBs. This does not show in the parish council, but in the self-confidence of the laity to establish lay groups, as happened with the Charismatic Renewal Movement and the Legion of Mary, or to continue in groups that are old-fashioned if seen from the liberationist perspective, as is the case with the Apostleship. The result is a diverse local religious order, of which besides the CEBs also the prayer group attracts most people.

But I think we can conclude more from the foregoing description of the various lay groups in the parish. In many analyses, base communities are evaluated as a radical change within Catholicism, because they stimulated the organization of poor lay people. If we consider the whole spectrum of groups within a contemporary parish, however, CEBs are just one type among many in which lay people come together to give expression to their religious beliefs. To assess the meaning and impact of base communities, we must place them in their proper context, as one of the many forms of local lay organizations within Catholicism.

Rather than representing a break with the past, in Colina the CEBs are evidence of the continuity of Catholic identity and community. To become a member, it suffices to be a Catholic, and most Brazilians identify themselves as Catholics. Nowadays, base communities perform many functions in the parish organization and therefore the laity easily come into contact with the ideas of liberationist Catholicism. Consequently, the ideology of liberationist Catholicism expressed in the base community structure has become a kind of norm for the way 'Catholicism is nowadays'.

Base communities became the standard of lay organization, but at the same time did not replace other forms. The result is that they have much in common with other groups. And the consequence of this is that the laity do not have to choose between one or the other: many CEB members combine their participation in the liberationist founded groups with membership of associations that come from another time and another ideological orientation. Recently, the RCC has taken an important place among these other groups. Although in theory a local bishop may forbid the movement to hold meetings, the autonomy of the movement seems to guarantee a great capacity to spread and grow in Brazil. However, its followers are not necessarily those Catholics who felt no attraction to the CEBs. Seemingly, the faithful find no problems in combining the various religious discourses. In the next chapter, I will go into this process of mediating significations and religious activities.

6 The mediation of liberationist Catholicism

In the previous chapter, attention was paid to the socioeconomic and cultural structure that form the context of the lay groups' activities and of the meanings the laity gives. In this chapter, I will deal with the process of mediation. This is a necessary step to take in order to explain the importance of liberationist Catholicism in the parish. How do the people conceive of the base communities in their parish? How do people act in relation to these understandings? Finally, what is the outcome of this process of mediation in terms of meanings and practices in relation to the lay groups?

However, this chapter starts with a closer look at the groups under study. Until now I have spoken of 'members of the groups', 'laity' and 'lay people' without differentiating much between the terms. Here, I will first present the social characteristics of these actors and analyse their activities and opinions regarding their participation in the religious groups of the parish. As CEBs and the charismatics attract most people in the parish, I will concentrate mainly on these two forms of lay association. I will then focus on the analysis of the process of mediation. From a practice approach point of view, the current state of affairs of the organization and activities of the laity in local Catholicism is not something that happens to the people, but something they make. In this production process, they are motivated and constrained by the religious order within which they operate. The cultural politics of the clergy form one part of these 'constraints'. Liberationist Catholicism in Garanhuns puts a lot of effort into creating a social and symbolic organizational structure for the laity in base communities. In the previous chapter, I pointed out some responses of the local actors to the cultural politics of the clergy, such as the formation of base communities. However, as I stated, there is also room for manoeuvre. Here, the reception of liberationist Catholicism must be studied. To put it simply, what do people do with the ideas and methods propagated by the clergy, and why?

In the second section, special attention is given to an important part of the context of receptivity, the gender ideology of Brazilian society and of the religious order in the parish. The third section deals with questions of leadership in the local religious organization. The fourth section focuses on the processes of collective and individual meaning-making and social action related to the religious dimension of daily life, while the fifth presents the main conclusions of this chapter.

6.1 The social characteristics of the members of groups

Who are members of the lay associations in the parish of São Vicente? People's choices and activities regarding their religious participation cannot be separated from factors as socioeconomic position, gender, age and education. Furthermore, the social composition of rural CEBs, urban CEBs and the urban charismatic prayer group differs in several ways. I will therefore discuss their membership one by one. I will start with rural CEBs, go on to their urban counterparts, and finish with the charismatic group.

RURAL BASE COMMUNITIES

As far as membership is concerned, lay groups in the rural area and those in the urban context have different characteristics. In the rural area, CEBs are usually the only form

of lay organization available. An important consequence of this is that people of all ages and backgrounds participate in them.

With respect to income and social status, the poverty that pervades the countryside characterizes the situation of most people. Only a few larger landowners escape this fate, and that sets them apart socially. Running water and electricity are rare in the *sítios*. The houses are basic, generally without a ceiling. They have two bedrooms, at most, and a kitchen, but most have no bathroom. The majority of families own a small house and a few *léguas* of land on which to grow the basic staples (beans and manioc). Often they also have a few chickens and goats, or a couple of cows. They also plant *palma*, a cactus that serves as fodder for the animals. In years with sufficient rainfall, most of these families manage to sell a few sacks of beans or a fatted goat or cow, and thus obtain cash to purchase clothing or medicine.

The *fazendeiros* generally do not take part in rural CEBs. However, there are many sorts of *fazendeiro* and some do participate, as is the case with *sítio Água Limpa*. In this rural community, the dedication of the local *fazendeiro* is so great that he and his family played a major role in a CEB project to construct a system of running water in the community. I will tell the story of this project in Chapter 7.

The religious base communities are representative of the poor part of the rural population as regards age and gender. Young and old men and women participate in the meetings. A meeting in *sítio Água Limpa*, for instance, easily attracts forty to fifty persons. Since the people hold the meetings in private houses, these therefore become overcrowded. Yet being packed in a sitting room creates an intimate atmosphere, and people chat and have fun. The oldest participants occupy the few available chairs and the others stand, also in the doorway and in front of the house, where generally the young men are to be found. Other communities have a communitarian meeting place, or use the community's primary school. These are spacious, but less intimate.

In rural communities, an equal number of men and women participate in the meetings, especially if they are held in the evening. However, in the community of Brejo dos Santos, which holds its meetings on Saturday afternoons, there were considerably fewer men at the ordinary meetings. This may be related to other commitments at this time of the day. Nevertheless, when a meeting was held to discuss the legal status of the group - a matter considered important by everybody - significantly more men were present. This means that men managed to put aside other duties on special occasions. In other words, perhaps the male members of the community were somewhat less motivated to participate every week than the female members were. There may be other reasons, too. The community of Olho de Água also held its meetings on Saturday afternoons and could always count on the attendance of the male members of most families. A comparison of these two communities reveals certain important differences. Olho de Água has a glorious history of communitarian action; they succeeded in their campaign for running water (Chapter 4, pp. 76, 92). Furthermore, the leader of this community is a man, while the leadership of Brejo dos Santos is in the hands of two women, a point that might be important for the prestige of the group. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

Apart from CEBs, some rural communities have women's groups. However, the women in these groups also participate in the CEB and the groups may have the same female leader. Such a women's group then serves more as a subdivision of the CEB than as

a separate, distinct organization. The only one in the rural area that functions as a group for a certain age category is the rural PJMP (*Pastoral de Jovens no Meio Popular - rural*), the rural youth's movement. Generally, the connection between the group of young people and the CEB is strong. They hold joint activities and the more involved youngsters participate in the meetings of CEBs, something they do not do in the urban context, to which I come now.

URBAN BASE COMMUNITIES

CEBs in the urban zone differ from rural CEBs in many respects. In the urban area, the number of options available to individuals who wish to participate in a religious group is larger. This results in the interested laity being distributed among different groups, according to tastes and preferences, and also to age and gender.

To begin with, in general youths participate less in town than they do in the rural zone. The Apostleship of Prayer has no members at all under the age of twenty-five, and none of the CEBs (with one exception) attract younger people. Only in the RCC prayer group do some young people participate on a regular basis. Because many study at night, however, young people only visit the weekly meetings on Monday evenings, when the college is closed. However, the large gatherings at the level of the diocese on saint's days or at the weekend can count on the attendance of many more youngsters.

Catholic youngsters in the neighbourhood hardly participate in base communities. As I mentioned in the previous chapter (p. 87), the *grupo de Crisma* functions as a general group for Catholic youngsters in Colina, much like the youth groups in the countryside. This may be why they do not participate in CEBs. There are, however, other reasons why CEBs do not attract young people. First, the groups are quite unexciting and monotonous, especially when compared with the emotional and often joyful prayer meetings of the charismatics, which is perhaps why we find more young people participating in the RCC. Further, the discourse of CEBs may be unattractive to the young, as Burdick suggests in his book on what he calls 'the religious arena' in a town in the state of Rio de Janeiro (1993:117-145). He states that CEBs do not offer an escape from the constraints of youth culture.¹ I however do not find any particular support in my data for this analysis. I did observe problems within the youth group related to "(...) youthful rivalries, jealousies, and status-rankings" (Burdick 1993:127), but I doubt whether this is a specific problem of the Catholic group. A final explanation may be that the small groups, meeting in the houses of participants, are not really open to the potential newcomer. It is telling that the only CEB in the neighbourhood with members under twenty-five has as many as five under this age. To partake in the group with some friends may make religious participation more comfortable, easy and attractive.² At the request of the priest, I organized a survey concerning the social characteristics of the members of CEBs. It turned out that the average age of the participants in these groups was forty-seven.³ The oldest person participating

1 Burdick does not provide a definition of youth culture, but seems to mean some general "high anxiety" caused by "tense, burdensome sexual and material competition" (1993:119).

2 Burdick (1993:127) also observed this: "Quite often, such young men and women lack social confidence, a lack aggravated by the *comunidad's* new, characteristically small groups." During my visits to CEB meetings, I was often asked to do the reading. I suspect that they did this not only to be courteous, but because many of them were shy.

3 Three members of the *grupo de Crisma* helped gather the data. In three weeks, all CEBs in the

in a base community in Colina was eighty-eight and the youngest eighteen.

In comparison to age, characterizing the participants of the groups in the urban part of the parish regarding their social situation is more difficult. Most members are poor, although poverty takes various forms here, as it does in Brazil as a whole. Of the eighty-four CEB members who took part in the survey, only twenty-one (25%) had a paid job. Twelve had an independent job as a market vendor, tailor or peasant, or did odd jobs (*biscateiro*). Seven were employed as a driver or street sweeper, or in a shop or the building trade. Only three performed skilled work: a bookkeeper, a schoolteacher and a civil servant. There were three students; the rest were housewives or had no paid job.⁴

Almost three-quarters of the participants live on one minimum salary or less. The majority of members of all but one CEB - which is located in a more affluent part of the neighbourhood - lives on this (absolutely less than) social minimum. The average income in the exception is one to two salaries, which, however, by no means provides a high standard of living. Poverty in this region is endemic. In fact, the whole context of Catholicism in Garanhuns is permeated with the problems related to the economic situation of the believers. This of course is reflected in various forms and consequences.

One aspect of poverty is illiteracy. More than half (57%) of CEB participants who took part in the survey are illiterate. Twenty-five had some years of primary school, four had finished primary school and seven had a secondary education. These figures indicate that the illiteracy rate is much higher than the average for the Northeast as a whole (35.9%). However, this is not because base communities attract less educated people. The average for Garanhuns was 48% in 1980, which is also well above the regional average. In the rural area, the illiteracy rate is higher than in the urban part of the municipality (73% and 40%, respectively; IBGE-Garanhuns 1988). Compared with these figures, it is not surprising that most members of the CEBs in a poor neighbourhood of Garanhuns are illiterate.

Members of the other groups in the parish have the same educational background. I recall the story of the foundation of the Legion of Mary (see page 99), which included the episode of the request to Marisa to become president of the group because none of the other women could read and write. Illiteracy might be an obstacle to becoming a leader of a religious group, but is not an impediment. Of the eight CEB leaders in Colina, three are illiterate.

The most significant statistic to emerge from the survey among CEBs in the Colina neighbourhood was that 82% of the participants are women. Of the eight groups surveyed, three do not have any male participants. Although female participation in Catholicism is known to be higher than male participation, this proportion is exceptionally high. In comparison to Mass attendance and membership of rural base communities, the membership of urban CEBs is overwhelmingly female.

neighbourhood were visited during their weekly meeting, and participants were asked to respond to questions concerning age, education, income, their motivation to participate and how long they had been involved in the base community and other religious groups. I will make use of some of their answers in this chapter.

4 My data on the social background of the people involved in the lay groups differ from that given in the available literature on Brazilian Catholicism. Drogus (1997) and Mariz (1994) found an average of four minimum salaries. However, this may be a relative difference. Salaries in the Northeast are lower than those in the southeast, and may even be lower in the interior of states as compared to urban zones in and near capital cities.

All the other lay groups also have mainly female members.⁵ The Legion of Mary had only female members, and the Apostleship of Prayer has only one male participant. The same applies to the RCC, the participants in which also share other characteristics with the members of base communities. Counts during the meetings of the RCC in the same period showed a sex ratio comparable to the average base community: 80 to 90 percent of the participants are women. Although the survey did not include the groups of the RCC and the Apostleship of Prayer, my observations and interviews do not indicate that the incomes of the individuals participating in these groups deviate from the data related to CEBs. The same goes for the level of education of most of the participants in this lay group. This observation surprised me. The scarce general information available at the time of my research maintained that the Charismatic Renewal Movement was largely a middle-class affair (Benedetti 1988, Ribeiro de Oliveira et al. 1978). Recent research on the RCC in Brazil, however, confirms my observation and acknowledges the presence of the lower classes in the groups (Mariz 1996, Machado 1994). The only exceptions are the charismatic youngsters, among whom are many students of the local faculty. Since no other lay group has a considerable number of young people among its participants, a comparison on this point is not possible.

POOR WOMEN

With respect to race, I found no differences between rural and urban groups. In the municipalities in the area of São Vicente's parish, more than half of the people call themselves *pardo* (dark-skinned). In Caetés, this designation is used by 75% of the population. *Preta* (black) is used by only a few percent of the population (IBGE 1982:1.11). Of course, this does not mean that the inhabitants of the region share one phenotype. *Pardo* is a very general term, one not used much in colloquial speech. Terms for black (like *negro* or *preto*) were more frequently used, and often pejoratively. I found no indications, however, that race is a selective element in base communities. People of all phenotypes participated. Several CEBs had black leaders.⁶

In short, when we speak of the participants in the lay groups in Garanhuns, we are mainly talking about poor women aged between thirty and sixty. Other studies also report a majority of women for other places in Brazil. Various authors mention a percentage as high as 80% (Alvarez 1990:381, Castro 1987:140, Drogus 1990:64, Hewitt 1991:64, Macedo 1986:111, Mariz 1994:44,117). All these research projects were carried out in large cities. For the RCC, fewer figures are available, but evidence points in the same direction (Benedetti 1988:246, Machado 1994:70).⁷

The question, then, is: why are women in the majority in the lay groups in the parish? And, more important, what is the relation between the social composition of the base communities and other lay groups on the one hand and the actual outcome of the religious

5 Since in the neighbourhood all non-CEB lay movements have only one group, I cannot make a comparison between the different groups of these movements.

6 Since I did not compare Catholic groups with other religious groups (e.g. Pentecostal churches or followers of Afro-Brazilian religions), I do not know whether black persons are more attracted to these than to the base communities, as Burdick (1993) found.

7 In fact, the first study of Catholic Charismatics in Brazil, which was published in 1978, included a survey of 300 prayer groups. It stated that the percentage of women participants was 71.4% (Oliveira et al. 1978:24).

practice of these groups on the other? And how about male participation in the groups? Including gender in the analysis will provide an insight into the practice and ideological significance of the Catholic lay movements under study. I will now address these questions through an analysis of what motivates people to join.

6.2 Religious participation of women and men

The preponderance of women in CEBs and other religious groups raises several questions. The first is why women outnumber men in these groups. The ordinary members of a base community offered a unanimous explanation for the disproportionate participation of women in the groups: “*Religião é coisa de mulher*” (“Religion is something for women”). In the literature, the most common explanation given is that female religious action reflects gender ideals in the wider society, where religion is considered “women’s business” (cf. Drogus 1990:64, Hewitt 1991:63). In fact, women were participating in Catholic groups long before CEBs or charismatic prayer groups were founded. Seen in this light, their contemporary involvement is a continuation of existing practices and customs.

Membership of the groups in Garanhuns confirmed this idea. Women not only outnumbered men, but often also combined membership of a base community with commitment to other religious groups and activities. Almost half of all women involved in urban CEBs also participated in one or more other associations. The most popular of these was the Apostleship of Prayer, with the *pastoral dos doentes* and the charismatic prayer group in second and third place, respectively. The Apostleship of Prayer has a long though interrupted history in the neighbourhood (Chapter 4) and can therefore be seen as a sign of the continuing religious participation of women. Some women claimed to have been involved for more than forty years. The few men involved in urban CEBs were also likely to develop other religious activities in the parish, but they less often gave lifelong religious participation as an explanation for this.

GENDER AND RELIGION

In Colina, the idea that religion is women’s business is widespread, also among the members of the Catholic lay groups in the parish of São Vicente, as we have seen. Once I heard a seven-year-old boy say that he was not going to Mass “because that is for women”. He thus expressed the idea that involvement in religion does not fit with the image of manhood in Brazilian society. The image of womanhood is in turn related to attitudes and values that can be linked to religious activities. This small boy was already aware of the general gender ideology of Brazilian society.

Both gender images are grounded in wider cultural beliefs and in the organization of society. The men and women of the religious groups in the parish share many characteristics, such as poverty and illiteracy. But their actual situation differs in a variety of ways. These differences can be symbolized in physical terms: the house and the street. As the Brazilian anthropologist DaMatta put it:

There is a clear distinction between two fundamental social spaces that divide Brazilian social life: the world of the house and the world of the street - where, theoretically, there is work, movement, surprise and temptation (1986:23, translation MdT).

The house and the street are symbols of different moral orders. The home is where hierarchies of gender and age dominate and create personal obligations, while the street

is the domain of personal freedom, where social rules are not pre-established and may be disobeyed (DaMatta 1978:70-79). Women are identified with the house and men with the street.⁸

The moral orders of the house and the street demand social roles. Men and women fulfill different roles in their respective domains. Women's roles spring primarily from the family. They are mothers and wives, responsible for the well-being of their family members. Men are expected to bring home the money. The identification of women with the private sphere involves such values as care-giving and responsibility for the socialization of children. A woman is expected to be a good mother and wife, to care for the house and family, to be the guardian of good morals, and to be obedient to the male members of her family - not only her husband, but her father, brothers and sons.

In Brazil, women are in many respects second-class citizens, while at the same time they are considered superior in moral respects. This ambiguity is expressed in the concept of *marianismo*, one often used to typify the ideals of femininity in Latin American countries. *Marianismo* refers to a secular system of beliefs and practices concerning the position of women in society, although the name is of course derived from the sacred symbol of the Virgin Mary, which lends a great part of its meaning to it. Machado (1994:140) states that:

The emphasis on virginal motherhood creates conditions for Mary to be seen as an asexual being, and it is in this condition that woman's inferior nature acquires a benevolent character and the woman a moral superiority (translation MdT).⁹

Thus, *marianismo* is "the cult of female spiritual superiority" (Steenbeek 1986:64, translation MdT), which depicts women as semi-divine, morally superior and spiritually stronger than men.¹⁰ This superiority gives women the capacity for sacrifice and humility. Although these characteristics are ideal types and actual behaviour varies depending on the individual personality and the context in which it takes place, this general gender ideology prevails in Brazilian culture.

In a research project exploring the connections between gender and religion in base communities in São Paulo, Drogus found that the cultural model of *marianismo* was prominent in the ideas about relations between men and women in society. She states that although we do not know whether it is a consequence or a source of larger patterns of cultural attitudes about gender, "Mary has been used as a model of women's domesticity and passivity with respect to the public, 'male' sphere (...)" (1997:61). Not only the Church but also the state, the legal system, schools and the mass media reinforce and transmit these images (cf. Stölen 1992). As Westwood and Raddiffe (1993:12) put it in their introduction to an edited volume on women and nation in Latin America, "(...) men and masculinity are tied to the defence of the nation and the protection of family, home and the people, while women are cast not as defenders but as reproducers of the nation as wives and mothers".

⁸ The idea of home is not the same as 'private', as in the opposition 'public - private' much used by social theory, especially in early feminist writing. In DaMatta's analyses (1978, 1986), the notions of encompassment and mediating through symbols are key concepts used to understand what he calls "the Brazilian dilemma". In fact, it identifies 'the other world' as the space where the house and the street are mediated symbolically (DaMatta 1986:109-122, Hess 1995:14).

⁹ Based on Ary 1988:4-6.

¹⁰ See also Stevens 1973.

The idea of religion as a women's affair and the cultural model of *marianismo* are highly compatible. Women are thought to have the aptitude for religious affairs. Furthermore, they are believed to possess all types of personality traits that account for their interest and activities in the religious sphere. In comparison to men, they are believed to be more spiritually receptive (Burdick 1993:106), humble (Lerch 1982:249), open-hearted (Novaes 1985a:73) and submissive (Boyer-Araújo 1995:138), and these qualities make them especially suitable for religious activities. The love of a mother for her children is a core element of womanhood (cf. Scheper-Hughes 1992) and is related to religious activity. Even women who do not participate very often in group activities pray at home and consider it important to teach their children to pray. Especially in the socialization of girls, much emphasis is put on religiousness. In addition, participation in religious groups is considered a respectable activity for them (Leda Machado 1993:106-7).

Apart from the cultural beliefs about the appropriate roles for women, the division of tasks between men and women has practical results that enable women to manage their time more flexibly and create time for religious activities. The disproportionately large proportion of women participating in the religious groups in the parish of São Vicente is therefore also due to practical reasons. The women involved are mostly married and have children, but do not have a job outside the house.¹¹ Between their household chores, they can make a quick visit to the priest to fetch the *roteiro* for the next meeting, or meet another member of the group to prepare the *novena*. On their way to pick up their children from school, they can also visit a sick member of the group. Women in the rural groups have the same flexibility, although they restrict contacts with the priest or members of other groups to their occasional visits to town, usually on market days. Most men in the urban part of the parish have a ten-hour working day, during which they are away from the house and neighbourhood. Only those who have their own small business are sometimes able to take time off for activities related to their religious groups. The same goes for the small farmers in the rural zones, if they are not dependent on earnings from their work on the *fazendas*. Like women, these men have more choice concerning what they do with their time.

Unlike the word *marianismo*, its counterpart *machismo* is part of Brazilian colloquial language. Parker (1991:44) found that the figure of the *machão* is very important in the construction of masculinity.

As much as any other single figure, the *machão* embodies the values traditionally associated with the male role in Brazilian culture - force and power, violence and aggression, virility and sexual potency.

Important here is that religion is not considered an ideal activity for men, a feeling that is deeply rooted in Brazilian culture. In sum, the general gender ideology connects religiousness much more to femininity than to masculinity. Both women and men generally refer to these ideas and act according to them.¹² For the study of the CEBs, *marianismo* and *machismo* are useful concepts with which to describe the division of roles in the religious order. As such, they help us to understand why so many women are involved in religious groups. However, we should not jump to conclusions.

¹¹ This seems to be the case also in other places in Brazil. See Burdick 1990:155, Drogus 1997, Mariz 1994.

¹² Below I will discuss the position of men in the groups.

BEYOND DICHOTOMIES

There are risks involved with the uncritical use of categorizations and such dichotomies as private-public or *marianismo-machismo*. In this religious context, the major shortcoming of the application of these concepts is that the participation of women runs the risk of being depicted as a negative choice: they have no other legitimate excuse to escape from household chores, for example. If we analyse the participation of women this way, the possibility of a positive female contribution to the construction of the religious seems to be ruled out. The women themselves have a more positive perception of their religious occupations.

The same circumstances that offer women more possibilities to take part in religious occasions and groups also make them eager to participate. The relative isolation of women, resulting from their confinement to the house, makes participation in religious groups a welcome change from the daily monotony. Marisa told me that for many years she had been confined to her house, where she had taken care of her husband and two children. She was not happy in her marriage "because there was no love", and used to cry a lot. Now she is one of the most active members of the parish groups. Although her relationship with her husband is still far from good, she has learned to cope with it since she decided to make her own life meaningful and started participating in the local Church groups. She is now more busy than ever, but this is on her own initiative and not because her husband demands this of her. She likes what she does and perceives her activities as rewarding and something she does for herself. Now that the domestic chores are no longer the only activities that occupy her time, they are less depressing. Other women used similar words when describing the place of their religious activities in their domestic lives. As Caldeira (1990:57) observes, women perceive the time spent on religious meetings as time for themselves.

They use this 'time for themselves' to learn and to enjoy themselves. 'Learning' is twofold. First, they learn about God. Especially in CEBs and the charismatic prayer group, the Bible takes a central place. Participants in all groups emphasize the importance of *O Evangelho* and the Word of God. Many CEB members referred to the aspect of acquiring knowledge as a motive for participation. We must not forget that only relatively recently has the Bible become available to all members of the Catholic Church. Older people recall that only thirty or forty years ago Mass was still read in Latin. Participants in the groups appreciate that they have direct access to the knowledge of the Bible. The importance of this should not be underestimated. Banck (1990:75) suggests that access to the Word of God symbolizes

(...) access to the world of written words, holy, magic or profane, the written codes which are constantly demonstrated to be all important in the modern world.

This meaning may be especially important for women, who are generally more excluded than men from the blessings of this modern world. They appreciate the freedom to talk about their understanding of the Bible and about religious teachings.

If we consider that women in general have few other public cultural spheres in which to speak out, the fact that they eventually learn to speak in public and give voice to their thoughts may be especially important to them. Of course, poor men are also largely excluded from political power, but as men they encounter fewer obstacles in public life than their

mothers, wives and daughters do. Marisa discovered that she is 'a person that is worthwhile'.¹³ She gained self-esteem and feels respected because everybody listens to what she has to say. Participation in a religious group can contribute to a feeling of empowerment, which can also turn out to be a means of coping with poverty and daily problems (cf. Mariz 1994). Some say that their self-confidence has increased since they started to participate in the groups. Others emphasize that they feel that they now 'count as real persons'.

Second, the learning is not only of a religious nature. In CEB meetings, men and women are encouraged to verbalize their views and beliefs and to speak in public. This is not easy for everyone. I witnessed many meetings during which the leaders had to drag every word out of some participants. Some, despite having been a member for a long time, prefer just to listen and to only take part in the prayers they have known since childhood. Others, however, are more at ease with the 'translation' of the Word of God into their day-to-day experiences. Even when there is no direct relation between the topics proposed for discussion in the *roteiro*, participants can learn of the involvement of the other women in the group. This applies not only to CEB meetings, but also to those of the other groups.

A member of the *Apostolado da Oração* said:

Seeing the difficulties of other persons (...) there are so many problems that people have. (...) Sometimes, one opens her heart, they pour out their problems. And then one says a word of comfort, and we go to pray together, all together. (...) I think this is rewarding for us. I believe that for God this also counts.¹⁴

The religious meetings are an occasion to meet and to discuss all kinds of topics related to the lives of the participants. Since the majority are women, the problems discussed often involve domestic issues, such as concerns about the health and education of children. Because the women share a lot of troubles they can offer each other possible solutions. Thus, for many group members the meetings also serve as an important source of information.

A third way in which the membership of religious groups is experienced as something women do 'for themselves' is that the meetings are experienced as being pleasant. The groups serve more than just a religious goal, as one CEB leader explained:

Most of the time we work with the *roteiro*, but when we do not have one we do it with the Bible itself. Often with ... just us meeting to chat, say a rosary and sing — we sing a lot because our group is very enjoyable.¹⁵

Women in other groups also stressed this social meaning of their participation in religious affairs. This effect is even more apparent in rural communities, since there are even fewer other opportunities to socialize.

In sum, the social role of women and the cultural beliefs related to this role contribute to the interest of women in religious affairs. Religion is traditionally the domain of women

13 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 5: "que eu era uma pessoa que valia a pena."

14 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 10: *Vendo as dificuldades de outras pessoas (...) tantos problemas, assim das pessoas (...) E às vezes, um se abre com, se abre com outro. E aí toma-se, um dizendo uma palavra de conforto. Indo lá, rezar juntos, todos juntos. (...) eu acho que pra... pra nós é gratificante. E eu acho que pra Deus também é válido.*

15 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 1: *"Muitas vezes a gente trabalha com o roteiro, mas ..., as vezes quando não tem roteiro, a gente faz assim pela bíblia mesmo, e muitas vezes com ..., só a gente se encontrando pra conversar, rezar um terço e cantar muito, que nós cantamos muito, que nosso grupo é bem animado."*

and this legitimizes their participation (Caldeira 1990:61). However, the involvement of women is not simply and solely a choice prescribed by the gendered social and cultural order prescribed in the dichotomies discussed here. Women who are members of groups in the parish have chosen to become actively involved in the religious. They combine the cultural preference of religion being 'women's business' with a practical understanding of their participation being something that they do because they like it, which helps them to develop themselves and is a welcome break from their daily routine.

CONFLICTING IDEALS

Another reason not to end the analysis with the recognition of the norms and ideals in the general gender ideology is that there are restrictions on female religious participation. That religion is considered women's business is not to say that women are free to engage in any religious activity. The ideals of proper roles are ambiguous. The demand to be a good woman - i.e. to be a hard-working housewife, dedicated totally to household duties - conflicts with religious participation, which requires leaving the house. In their early years of motherhood, many women therefore restrict their religious activity to attending Sunday Mass. Only when their children are older do they become active members of Church groups. Joanina's testimony is exemplary. She was forty-five when I spoke to her, and her youngest daughter was ten. Joanina had only recently become an active member of various groups. She had had the desire to participate earlier, but felt she could not because of her duties at home.

To leave the house with the work not done, then you leave preoccupied (...) That does not work. I only started [going to Church groups] when I saw that I could take the responsibility to leave without being preoccupied. Thanks to God, my turn has arrived and now I participate in everything.¹⁶

Besides the domestic workload that prevents them from taking up other occupations, the women often meet opposition from their male family members. Husbands think that their spouse should not spend too much time on religion, and that her principal duty is to the house and the children. Such was the case with Joanina.

My husband wanted to forbid me [to go to church]. I said, "You cannot forbid me, hinder my going to my church. If I were to go to a dance, a birthday party, or something like that, then okay, but to my church, where I was born and grew up, you cannot take me from there now, do not".¹⁷

Finally her husband agreed, and Joanina got his permission - or "was liberated" as she put it, with a big smile.¹⁸

Joanina's words also indicate another important aspect of female religious activities, i.e. that they enter the public domain by leaving the house. Her comparison of going to a dance with going to church reveals that this was an important topic in the discussion with her husband. Leaving the house and going to 'the street' is seen as a threat to male control over women, because wives and daughters may meet other men. Apart from

16 Interview 910321-256 / sheet 2-3: "*A gente, para sair, deixar compromisso em casa, a gente sai preocupado, né, (...) não dá, né. Eu só posso assumir quando eu ver que tenho mesmo responsabilidade para sair e sem me preocupar, aí graças a Deus agora chegou a vez, né, só agora eu participo de tudo.*"

17 Interview 910321-256 / sheet 2-3: "*(...) O velho quis me proibir, eu digo, você não pode me proibir não, empatar de eu ir pra minha igreja não, se eu fosse para uma festa, um aniversário, qualquer coisa, tudo bem, mas pra minha igreja, que eu nasci e me criei dentro, pra você me tirar agora, tira não.*"

18 Interview 910321-256 / sheet 2: "*(...) hoje eu sou liberta.*"

the real risks involved, the possibility that 'something may happen' makes women - and by extension, their male family members - vulnerable to gossip.

One afternoon during carnival, Marisa went into the town centre with her son and daughter and two other female members of her CEB. She asked her husband to come with them, but he did not want to go and objected to her going. They had a quarrel and she went anyway. They met a seminarist and the whole group decided to join in a *frevo* (a jumping carnival dance).

We started to play, to jump, to have a lot of fun. It was great. But then I said, look, you see, here we are partying, while my husband is at home. (...) I know with whom I was playing, with whom I went. And in fact nothing happened. We just had fun.¹⁹

Although she had ignored her husband's objections, she was well aware of the risks she was taking. She was bothered not only by the complaints of her husband but also by the whisperings on the street:

On our way home, we said to each other, Look, there were people on this street where we live who think we should not take part in the dancing. The moment we started the *frevo*, we were already censored, they already said: "Can you imagine - she, the saint?"²⁰

Women who take an active role in Church matters become especially prone to this kind of comment. As Marisa explained, public opinion expects irreproachable conduct from her and her colleagues in the parish. For a woman who is engaged in Church affairs,

you must be a saint. So you may not make mistakes. Thus, you may not dance the *frevo*, drink or have too much fun, because then you will be showing off too much. These things You have to lower your head, be quiet, and say amen to everything.²¹

As long as religious tasks are limited to going to church and praying, women can relatively easily respond to these demands. However, in liberationist Catholicism the clash between the different elements of the expected role of women, between the private and the public, becomes more acute. In this version of Catholic religion, an explicit link is established with daily, domestic life and the secular aspects of the organization of society. The ideal images of womanhood thus conflict within the realm of religion itself. Some signs of this are very obvious. Several women told me that their husbands are jealous when they go to meetings. Olívia, the leader of the community of Brejo dos Santos, could not go to the diocesan assembly in 1990 because it would have meant her sleeping in the seminary for two nights, and her husband wanted her to sleep with him, at home. Since Zeca lives mostly in São Paulo, Olívia can travel and visit meetings when he is not around. Once she even went to a week-long meeting of female peasants in Brasília; she very proudly showed me photos of the occasion. Although other results of the clash are more hidden, they are also more profound.

The problem lies in the content of the teachings of the liberationist campaign. Despite

19 Interview 910219-226 / sheet 2-3: "(...) começamos a brincar, a pular, se divertir a besa mesmo foi muito bom. E então, eu 'tava dizendo, eu disse, olhe, 'tá vendo, a gente farramos aqui, meu marido estava em casa, (...), mas eu sei com quem estava brincando, né? Com quem eu fui. E na realidade eu fui não pegou nada, que nós 'tava brincando simplesmente."

20 Interview 910219-226 / sheet 2-3: "E nós viemos comentando no caminho mesmo, dizendo, olhe, tinha gente aqui na rua que a gente mora e que a gente não podia entrar num frevo daquele com elas, porque a gente entrando, já estava sendo censurada, já estavam dizendo: 'já pensou, é a santa?'"

21 Interview 910219-226 / sheet 3: "É, precisa ser santa. Aí não pode falhar nada, não. Aí se for, não pode entrar no frevo, beber, não pode se divertir, achar graça demais porque já está se enxerindo, tudo isso. A pessoa tem de ser de cabeça baixa, não falar nada e... e tudo dizer amém."

the preponderance of women involved in the project of liberationist Catholicism, the campaign is not aimed specifically at women. Ideological sources, such as the *roteiros*, are paradoxical in as far as the role of women is concerned. On the one hand, liberationist Catholicism invites the poor classes - including women - to take part in the political struggle against capitalist oppression. This requires women to enter the public domain, for example, to be active in social movements. On the other hand, liberationist Catholicism stresses women's role as mother and wife. Thus, the role of women in the struggle is to be by her husband's side (Drogus 1990). The practical problems the union of these two ideals creates for women is not addressed in liberationist doctrine. The different and incongruent gender models are passed on to women, and it is left to them to find a solution.

MEN IN THE RELIGIOUS

The position of men in the religious prompts the last modification to the theory of the domination of the general gender ideology. The previous discussion of the position of women and the cultural beliefs concerning the gendered preference for religion raises questions concerning how the men involved in religious groups relate to the gender ideology in the wider society and in the religious discourse of liberationist Catholicism. If religion is considered something for women, what about men? Is their behaviour in the religious groups different from that of women? Some observations are appropriate here.

First, men who are active in religious groups are not considered deviant beings and are just as poor and illiterate as the women are. For example, Paulo is in his early fifties and live with his wife and five of his seven children, one daughter-in-law and two grandchildren in a small house up on the hill. After the death of a son, some twenty years ago, he turned to religion and since then has become more and more involved in various activities in the parish. The fact that Paulo is a man does not hold him back from religiosity and activism in the CEBs and other groups of the parish. He is highly regarded by the local Catholic community, although he does not correspond to the typical image of a *macho* Brazilian man. The acceptance of male religious activity even goes so far that groups headed by men have more prestige than those headed by women. I will discuss this point in Section 3 of this chapter.

Secondly, men who engage in religious activities often emphasize aspects of their religiosity that are generally associated with female activities. Again, Paulo is a good example. He manifests himself as a caring person, visiting the sick, talking to them, giving comfort to the needy - all acts associated with femininity in the general gender ideology. One of the tasks he carried out in the parish was to take the Eucharist to the sick in their houses. He said:

So these are the works we assume in the Church (...) taking [the Eucharist] to all the sick people. To know how they are, have a chat, converse with them. And so there, my life is bettered, developed.²²

This passage from a recorded interview with Paulo was similar to the explications given by female lay activists. However, there is one important difference. He mentioned the satisfaction this work gave him, but also emphasized that it is something you do in (*dentro*)

22 Interview 900528-70 / sheet 10: "*Então é esses trabalhos que a gente vai assumindo dentro da igreja (...) levando a esses doentes todinhos. Saber como ele estão, bater um papo, me dialogar com eles e lá eu, a minha vida foi muito mais melhorando, desenvolvendo-se.*"

the Church, suggesting that in other spheres of life other norms are applied - which in fact seemed to be the case, because even though I was a guest of his family many times, I never once saw him fulfil caring tasks.

This suggests that in the religious realm other gender ideals prevail than those that prevail in society in general. In other words, the gender images that are part of the public symbolic order are different from the ideals that are part of the religious order. In order to understand this, it is helpful to distinguish between the general gender meanings in Brazilian society, such as are expressed in the *marianismo-machismo* distinction, and the specific gender meanings - gender here as defined in this particular field of the CEBs or the local Catholic Church.²³ This specific gender ideology is connected to time, place and circumstances and is therefore situational (cf. Schlegel 1990). Femininity and masculinity are not mutually exclusive; even within one cultural order, different femininities and masculinities can exist (Moore 1994:58-61).²⁴

In the case of this male CEB leader, the religious context invokes other gender characteristics than those invoked within the household sphere.²⁵ Since Paulo is not considered a deviant person by the neighbourhood, we may conclude that in the religious context men can be active, and even perform tasks that in the popular gender definitions would be considered the responsibility of women. Paulo thus lives with at least two different gender roles. In his case, this does not seem to cause problems, although he did mention that his wife complains about his Sunday-morning duties. In other cases, the simultaneous workings of different ideologies can lead to conflicts, for example when female CEB members have to quarrel with their husband before they can leave their home to participate in a meeting.

In this respect, recent findings in the psychology of religion are interesting. Thompson (1991) found that being religious is a function of gender orientation rather than of being male or female. Both men and women can have a feminine orientation, and masculine and feminine outlooks are not mutually exclusive; thus in one context, multiple femininities and masculinities exist. Persons with a feminine gender orientation are more likely to be religious, according to this study.²⁶ This conception of gender and its relation to religion offers a means with which to go beneath the surface and examine the complexities of gendered religious meaning-making. However, the instruments Thompson used (e.g. multivariate analysis) are not applicable in anthropological research. Thompson's conclusions do, however, conform with the opinion of a female CEB leader in the parish, who told me that men who are interested in religion are different from ordinary men, because "they are half male, half female".²⁷

23 There can be many specific gender ideologies within one culture. Both the general gender ideology and the specific meanings are also changeable, or can be transformed. Furthermore, these ideologies inform each other and therefore specific meanings show a certain concordance with the general gender meanings. Both combine with other significations and ideologies of the culture (Schlegel 1990:24).

24 Furthermore, in many cultures gender is understood in processual terms (cf. Meigs 1990).

25 In other words, we should take masculinity and femininity as qualities of persons in a certain cultural and social context. Since people take part in different contexts, it is more correct to think in terms of masculinities and femininities.

26 See also Francis 1997.

27 Interview 941013-638 : "*São metade macho, metade femea.*" In the quest to understand the workings of these gender ideologies, it would be interesting to consider the hypothesis that the Catholic religious field requires its practitioners to have a specific gender orientation: men should be more feminine and women should be more masculine - although at this moment I prefer not to bum my

Thirdly, and related to the foregoing, men's 'conversion' stories contain explicit references to gender ideals and images. Generally, these are applied and used in the construction of the religious group and the experience of the believers. However, men made explicit use of conversion stories and were more likely to emphasize their personal changes. This became apparent in the religious autobiographies that people constructed. In a study of how female religious leaders deal with questions of religious leadership in their life stories, Sered (1995:258) shows that

individuals sort through their life experiences and select those incidents and events that to their mind show spiritual development and that prove the truth and efficacy of their religious beliefs.

In their religious autobiography, several male activists emphasized their development from a *machão* into a religious man, from a 'wrong man' into the man they are now. Paulo began with the words "I was not a man involved in the Church. I was such an erroneous man, sister",²⁸ and then continued with the details of his life before he became a practising Catholic:

the type of men wanting to follow God, that was totally beside me, nothing for me. There was no Mass, nothing of this at all, a man who loved to go on a spree, a man who would leave his wife and children in the house and all, and would arrive when he liked. I was a *machão*, I was the lord of everything, okay, I was totally wrong. I was wild, violent. I had not killed anyone, but had the opportunity arisen, I would have changed life with death.²⁹

This fragment from his 'conversion' story illustrates that Paulo draws on gender images in order to construct his religious identity. He uses the image of the *machão* to explain that before he was another person. He contrasts this gendered stereotype with the implicit 'less masculine' person he is now without implying, however, that he is no longer a man. For most women, the specific gender ideology prevalent in CEBS contrasts less with the expectations outside the religious sphere and they refer less often to images of masculinity and femininity in their descriptions of their religious experiences.

Fourthly, men experience fewer practical obstacles in their religious activism than women do. If we compare the transformation of Paulo into a committed Catholic with the stories of the many women who tried to escape from the restrictions imposed by the prevailing gender ideologies, his experience shows very few conflicts. The common values and norms for femininity and femaleness prove to be more demanding than the rules for masculinity and maleness.

To conclude this analysis of the gender of religion, it seems safe to say that gender is an important ingredient in the construction of religious significations and participation. Yet, the cultural rule that religion is a 'women's affair' does not dissuade men from participating. The next question to be addressed is how men and women act within the gendered cultural order so as to cope with the limitations and constraints it creates.

fingers on this question.

28 Interview 900528-70 / sheet 10: "Eu não fui um homem tão ligado a igreja não. Eu fui um homem tão errado irmã.."

29 Interview 900528-70 / sheet 11: "Daqueles tipo de homens que querem seguir a Deus, eu estava fora por completo, não estava comigo, não tinha uma missa, não tinha nada disso, um homem que gostava de farrar, um homem que deixava em casa a esposa com filhos e tudo, e chegava quando bem quisesse, era um machão, era o senhor de tudo, pronto, estava completamente errado. Era brabo, violento, só não havia dado em ninguém, mas se chegasse a oportunidade, eu trocava a vida pela morte."

MEDIATING CONFLICTING GENDER IDEALS

Several characteristics connected to *machismo* do not go together with religious activism, as the explication of Paulo revealed. Ideals of womanhood contain contradicting demands on religious women. Fortunately, "Neither *machismo* nor *marianismo* exist in a cultural vacuum; neither are innate characteristics of one sex or the other" (Ehlers 1991:11). Masculinity and femininity are not fixed because the specific gender ideology is connected to time, place and circumstances. This also opens room for manipulation and negotiation. The actors are faced with the problem of reconciling different ideologies and creating a meaningful and 'liveable' situation. How do lay members of the groups mediate the various elements of gender ideals in their religious practice?

The women who participate in Catholic lay groups operate in a field full of tension. On the one hand, being religiously active is culturally desirable; on the other hand, however, the ideal image of a woman is one who stays at home to take care of her husband and children. These two extremes contradict in the lives of all women. The clash may be soft or harsh, and can take many forms. In their individual lives, each will find some solution to and a way of coping with it. Some will choose not to become a member, while others will participate in only some activities and not others.

The clashing images not only create concrete practical limits to women's freedom of choice, they also help create women's aspirations. To a large extent, the women of the parish have internalized the same values as their husbands and fathers. They also think that their primary task is in the house, and that it is not done for a woman to walk alone through unlit backstreets in the evening. It is this shared culture, which also makes it a 'collective' problem, that finds its expression in the way the groups are given form by their members. In other words, the gendered dispositions influence the religious practices that are constructed in base communities and prayer groups.

Negotiations over the gender ideology in the CEBs are further complicated because in the groups the differences between men and women are less sharp than in the wider society and the general gender ideology. Marisa told me she came to realize - through conversation with the priest and the men participating - that not all men are brutish and violent like her husband. Precisely because the CEBs attract more 'feminine' men, who are usually not also 'real' *machões*, the structural inequality inherent in the general gender ideology becomes obscured in this specific context. In a research project into Pentecostal groups in La Paz, Gill (1990) found that this other masculinity was exactly what made these religious groups attractive to many women. As a consequence, male participation in groups that are predominantly female will not contribute to the elimination of gender inequality.

The position of men proved to be less problematic. However, my data might be insufficient to draw hard conclusions at this point. Because so few men are actively involved in CEBs and other groups, I largely base my observations on men in the religious who are also leaders. Compared with the overall low involvement of men in the groups, relatively many men are leaders. The authority and status that come with leadership are more consonant with the gender ideals of masculinity as compared to simple religious participation. Therefore, a leadership position might be an acceptable 'excuse' for men to take part in the religious. With respect to masculinity, being a leader probably reconciles 'being

religious' with the ideals of general gender ideology. This suggests that for male leaders the mediation process is less characterized by oppositions as compared to female group members in general.

In this section, we saw that the gender images of the larger society are reflected in several instances in the composition and functioning of the Catholic lay groups in the parish. Women comprise the majority of the rank and file of the religious groups. The general gender ideology of Brazilian society makes religious participation an appropriate and desirable activity for them. Although their participation may also create difficulties and conflicts in their personal lives, overall they enjoy attending the meetings. Above all, the women in the religious groups under study are not dissuaded from participating by the constraints created by conflicting gender images.

Of course, no public symbolic order is ever totally coherent and the gender hegemony of the larger society can only be partial. Nevertheless, the influence of this partial hegemony is indisputable. To be able to appreciate the consequences of the tension thus inherent in the cultural order, we must recognize the creative abilities of all actors involved in it. Much too often the role of women is limited to responding to an order created by men. However, women not only react to but also have their part in the creation and constitution of it (Dubisch 1991:35). Furthermore, reactions may also have creative consequences. The female members of the lay groups in the parish of São Vicente play a decisive role in the manner in which the liberationist ideals are mediated and incorporated into local religious customs and activities - just as their male co-members have, for that matter. In the construction of the religious groups and the behaviour of the believers, gender ideologies are instrumental, not only in its constraining aspects but also as a creative force. In the following section, we will see this insight illustrated again when we turn to the question of leadership in the groups.

6.3 The articulation of religious leadership

The actions and experiences of the leaders of base communities are more articulated than those of ordinary CEB members. In this section, I will go further into the organization of leadership in lay groups. It is to be expected that leaders have a large influence on the content and organization of group activities. Again, gender may be an important factor. Furthermore, the relation between lay activists and professional religious leaders, notably the clergy, is important. I will start with a discussion of their role before I go into the role of lay leaders and their relation with their groups.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

In the parish, the role of the clergy is important for both the founding and the survival of the groups. As far as the creation of CEBs is concerned, all involved agree that the initiatives were from professional religious agents, be it the parish priest, the nuns living in the parish, the friars of *sítio* Alma or the members of the Redemptorist mission that visited the area. Many CEB members and leaders refer to the charisma of these persons as their initial motivation to become involved in religious groups. Both Father Milton and *frei* Jaime are described as having inspiring personalities, capable of arousing the interest of people. Olívia said: "Father Milton is marvellous, he is the first person that liberated

us.”³⁰ Community leaders around *sítio* Alma talked in the same manner about *frei* Jaime. The Redemptorist missionaries seem to be exceptionally gifted at stirring up the people. “Father Jorge, he sets fire,” Elza said. Of those included in the survey, 30% explicitly referred to the invitation of the professional pastoral agents as their motivation for starting or joining a group.³¹

The active role of the clergy is not limited to founding the groups; they also play an important part in their continuation. Or perhaps I should say that they think that the groups should develop on their own, even though the majority of parishioners do not share this opinion. At a meeting of the parish council³² concerning the organization of the *via sacra* in 1991, the laity were muttering about the fact that the priest would not be present on all occasions. Father Milton explained that he also had to go to the other communities and that in his opinion the laity were capable of taking care of the ceremonies in the neighbourhood. With glum faces, the council members nodded and said they understood the problem. But then Josivalda interrupted the priest:

It is not that we are not able to organize the meetings of Lent by ourselves. It is that we want to show you all the beautiful things we do. We also want to know if we are doing things right.³³

Josivalda thus expressed the insecurity and need of approval felt by many lay activists in the parish. The other members of the council agreed with her, and the priest could do nothing but again express his confidence in the capabilities of the laity. There are several causes for differences of opinion like this.

The first problem is the size of the parish. Even though the practical division of the parish between Father Milton and *frei* Jaime (Chapter 5) means that the area to be covered is smaller, both ‘sub-parishes’ are still very large. The result is that the priest has limited time to spend in each community. Furthermore, a lot of time and energy is taken up by travelling. There are few other professional pastoral agents available in the parish, so the priest becomes the sole functionary people think they can count on.

The second problem is that there are different expectations and ideas about the roles to be taken in the organization of the religious. A tension between the understanding of the role of the priest by the laity and by the clergy became apparent on many occasions and during many discussions between the participants of the groups. Several group leaders in the neighbourhood complained about the lack of attention on the part of the priest and used this to explain the fact that their activities were low-key. They felt undervalued and said that the carelessness of Father Milton had undermined their initial enthusiasm. Néné, from the Barra group, said:

He agreed to a meeting, and then the people went through rain and wind to the other side of the hill and he didn’t show up. This was not the first time it happened. Sometimes we feel like quitting it altogether.³⁴

In fact, many groups that came into existence during the last Redemptorist mission in

30 Record 900616-81 : “*Pe. Milton é maravilhoso, é a primeira pessoa que libertou a gente*”.

31 Of 84 respondents, 52% said friends or relatives had invited them. 15% said they went on their own initiative. Of course, the categories do not exclude each other, i.e. it is possible that a person became enthusiastic about the CEBs through the sermons of the priest but only started to actually participate after a neighbour had invited her/him. Such a person could have mentioned the priest or the neighbour.

32 See note 124 page 88.

33 Record 910224-236.

34 Record 910227-243.

the parish in 1989 had already disappeared when I arrived six months later. Members of the community often blamed the lack of guidance for this. So whereas the priest thinks the groups should set their own agendas and resolve their own problems, many members of the groups feel they are not equipped to do so and want the orientation of the priest.

By the end of 1990s, the tension between the different opinions about the role of the priest increased. Father Milton considered returning to university in Recife and finding a job so that he could support himself financially. He reasoned that the diocese could not provide him with a regular income³⁵ and that a priest in a poor parish like his cannot live off the backs of his parishioners. He had dedicated four years to organizing the communities and thought that it was time for the laity to prove their ability to perform self-management in religious matters. He would still be available three or four days a week. He would leave for Recife on Tuesday mornings, and return on the following Thursday evening or Friday morning. Of course, he would be less accessible to the people and would not be able to visit all the communities as often as he used to. However, he said, the situation of a Brazilian priest³⁶ is like this and there is no other solution.

The parishioners were desperate. How could he leave them like that? Now that they had put so much effort into organizing their groups, he could not leave them without support. Especially the rural communities were very disappointed, because they realized that Father Milton would no longer have any time to visit them, something he usually did on weekdays. There were many discussions about the case, and representatives of several groups and communities came to the priest's house to try to convince him to leave things as they were. However, in 1991 Father Milton carried out his plan and started teaching three days a week at a college in Recife. The laity could do nothing but accept the new situation.

LAY LEADERSHIP

In the day-to-day practice of liberationist Catholicism, the laity and especially the lay leaders play an important role. As explained in the previous chapter, the organization of parish life is largely in the hands of the active members of the many groups. The leaders of these groups form a layer between the clergy and the ordinary members. This role has several aspects that deserve consideration.

Like the members of the groups, their leaders are usually 'of the people'. They live in the same poor circumstances, have had little education and are confronted by the same daily problems. Most leaders are literate, although some of the most committed are not. At some stage in their life, these people had developed a special interest in religious participation. Some were picked out by the clergy and some by other lay leaders, or they were put forward by their group, relatives or neighbours to become a leader.

From then on, their contacts with the priest and with other lay leaders become more frequent. They get involved in the planning of the activities in their area, most of the time under the auspices of the priest or a nun. The priest urges them to attend the weekly *escolinha de fé* that he and Sister Margarida organize. This is a course for *evangelizadores*

35 All priests receive one minimum salary a month from the diocese.

36 Note the emphasis on 'Brazilian'. Since the diocese has several foreign priests (including the bishop) this is significant. The Brazilian priests believed that missionaries had access to more resources because of their links with European countries. They were probably right in this. The privileged position of foreign priests induced envy among the Brazilian priests, especially among those of poor descent, like Father Milton.

to learn more about the Bible and the teachings of liberationist Catholicism. He also expects them to be present at the parish meetings of their pastoral group that he organizes at regular intervals, generally in preparation for the high points on the Catholic calendar. Furthermore, they are invited to take part in the meetings of their section of the diocesan organizational structure. The diocesan pastoral coordination team holds these meetings, which sometimes last two or three days, in the old seminary in Garanhuns. By instructing the leaders of the groups, the clergy tries to prepare them for their role as mediators of liberationist Catholicism.

The decision to become an active member of the religious community thus entails entering a whole new world of experience. It means new knowledge, religious understanding and familiarization with the liberationist interpretation of the political and social reality of Brazil. It also means the acquisition of new skills, such as speaking in public and taking part in discussions with other lay people and with the priest and nuns. For many participants, this is a difficult endeavour. I attended many meetings in which only a few participants took an active part, with the rest just listening. In this respect, the meetings of the leaders of the groups resembled the meetings of the groups themselves. As a result, meetings turned out to be lectures by the clergy rather than a democratic discussion. Often, the initial enthusiasm quickly faded, because the liberationist method was too complicated for the people. Many people did not show up after having attended some meetings. The *escolinha de fé* had many drop-outs.

Apart from a practical problem, this liberationist approach constitutes a break with the conception of religion in what Mariz (1993: 28) calls 'popular culture'. Most had little education and had not learned to reason in the abstract and rational way the clergy does. Only some group leaders seem able to assimilate the liberationist vision on the relation between religion and society and their specific role in this project. Others have more problems with this. Erundina - the representative of the Apostleship of Prayer at a meeting of all groups from the urban part of the parish, and member of the CEB in her street - said that the laity are supposed to take responsibility for the organization of the religious because the priest is lazy.³⁷

Being a leader of a group is a difficult task. A case in point is the leadership of the RCC prayer group in the parish. Since its foundation it has been headed by women from another parish in Garanhuns. The purpose of the groups was to cultivate potential leaders in Colina, but no suitable candidates emerged. In 1990, my informants assured me that the group had various potential leaders in the neighbourhood, who only needed to learn a little more. However, on my return in 1994 the group was still being guided by women from other parishes.

There is more to becoming an active member than simply learning new knowledge and skills. Once people enter the level of local leadership, they also become part of a new group of colleagues who share their commitment to the religious cause. Of course, this community also has requirements and expectations concerning its members. To be a leader of a CEB or another group means organizing its meetings and participating in all the leadership meetings at the level of the neighbourhood or parish, if not also the

37 Record 910203-213 / sheet 3: "*Nosso padre é o mais preguiçoso; por exemplo o lá da [neighbouring parish], dá gosto.*"

diocesan section, assembly or even regional meetings. This puts a considerable claim on the time of the individuals. The families of the lay leaders often do not agree with this. This is more often the case with female leaders than with male leaders, although the latter also report complaints from family members. For women, the problems are bigger. Many husbands object if they leave the house to attend a religious meeting. If there is travelling involved, or staying away for more than a day, women face extra difficulties. This might be another reason why women, although making up the majority of the participants, have fewer representatives at the level of leadership (Mariz 1994:42, Hewitt 1991:64).³⁸ An additional obstacle to participation beyond the own community is that representatives are often expected to pay their own travelling expenses.

Male CEB leaders seem to have fewer problems with their role as leader. One reason may be that they have a role model in the form of the priest. In fact, I observed that some of the male CEB leaders behaved as a sort of *mini-padre* within their group. There are two men who run groups outside their direct surroundings. They consider themselves 'apostles', travelling to spread the Word. They start up CEBs in other parts of the parish, guide them for one or two years and try to motivate other people to take over, after which they move on to their next project. Occasionally these men are also invited to assist the Redemptorist missionaries in other parishes in the region.

Being part of the group of leaders in the parish means being part of a small group, and that carries with it certain expectations and group dynamics. The community of Catholics expects flawless conduct, as we saw in the story of Marisa concerning her participation in carnival festivities. Within the group of leaders, the control on each other's comportment is still stronger. Severe criticisms are expressed behind backs, and sometimes at the meetings of the leaders. These criticisms often concern moral practices. One recurring theme was the question of selecting persons for membership or confidential tasks. Can a person who is known in the neighbourhood for her/his bad behaviour, such as living together without being married, nevertheless become a member of a religious group?

Simultaneously, positive feelings are induced by intensive participation. For some, becoming involved in the social group of lay leaders in the parish is an intense experience. Marisa recalled how she felt warmly received by the CEB and accepted just for being who she is. Her activism represents a new and meaningful life for her, a break from the depressed situation at home.³⁹ Involvement in the lay leadership of the parish deepened these feelings. In the group of lay leaders, she met new friends, some of whom were men. She eventually became ritually related to one of them when she became his daughter's *madrinha* at confirmation. From then on she always addressed him as *compadre*. The small social group of the religious leaders can provide a safe and rewarding community for these men and women.

Nevertheless, within this group of local religious leaders, gender differences play an important role. Although the male leaders may behave less *machão* than they do in the wider society, their interpretation of their role is not the same as that of the female leaders. Men are more often chosen to act as representatives at diocesan meetings and

38 One reason given for the fact that women do not go to the national inter-ecclesial meetings in large numbers is that their husbands forbid them to go (Libânio 1981, cited in Hewitt 1991:63).

39 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 5.

other extra-local activities. They also more often combine their leadership in a CEB with other organizing tasks in the parish. And at the meetings of all groups in the parish, they do most of the talking.

The parish priest also plays an active part in the creation and confirmation of differences between female and male leaders of lay groups. He does this in various ways. First, when it comes to the division of tasks, he acts very much within the lines of the general gender ideology. So, for example, women are more likely to be asked to make the food for the feast and men are more likely to be put in charge of the reading in the church. Thus, even in the liberationist discourse of the priest, women are addressed as wives and mothers, with a vocation for domestic duties and caring behind the scenes, while men perform the public tasks (cf. Chiriack and Padilha 1982:198). Second, the priest distributes his information and knowledge in a certain way among the laity. Consciously or unconsciously, he tends to privilege some people over others. Here, personalities and human liking or disliking combine. However, gender is also a factor. For example, Father Milton is more likely to involve male CEB leaders in discussions over responsibilities in the parish than female leaders. Third, the priest serves as a link to financial and political resources. This was most clear in the working area of *Frei Jaime*, where the CEBs had already accomplished several community projects. The leaders of these communities emphasized that the friar had played a pivotal role because he had found financial and political support. Significantly, men headed all these communities. One possible explanation is that the clergy are more inclined to invest time and energy in initiatives taken by male-led communities.⁴⁰ In sum, the way priests approach lay leaders and act upon their expectations towards the laity influences the role of these individuals in their groups and the parish as a whole. The distribution of knowledge and access to resources partly defines the influence and power of lay people.

In non-CEB groups, the influence of the priest is less strong. Since these groups are not seen as bricks in the building of the liberationist Catholic community, their activities are not so often scheduled into the organization of parish life. The *Apostolado* and the *Legião de Maria* have a meeting with the priest once in a while, and their representatives take part in the planning meetings of the parish. However, the leaders of these groups are not supposed to go to the *escolinha de fé* or the pastoral meetings of the diocese.

The charismatic prayer group is the most independent of all the groups, because Father Milton has no official position in the group, not even on paper. Nevertheless, he sporadically participates in the prayer meeting. On one such occasion, his authority in the group was nicely illustrated. The priest's sermon was about healing. He elaborated on the biblical grounds for miraculous healing. He said that the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), which promises cures for those faithful who pay their tithes, is a bunch of swindlers. His argument was that medical sciences and doctors are something given by God, and that therefore people should always look for medical assistance in case of illness, rather than relying solely on the miracles offered by churches. After his sermon, he left the meeting. One of the leaders of the charismatic group then gave her own interpretation of the priest's words. Without explicitly discrediting

40 Another explanation might be that female community leaders are less keen to develop projects that need political and financial resources. I will return to this point in the following section.

his sermon, she told the story of a priest from Recife who was ill. He did not believe in the power of the Holy Spirit at first, but when he came into contact with charismatic Catholics and started to pray for a cure, he was miraculously saved.⁴¹

LEADERS AND THEIR GROUPS

In Chapter 5, I briefly described the meetings of two urban groups. Marisa headed one, Alberto the other. We saw that the styles of these two CEB leaders were quite different. The activities of their groups were also of a distinct nature. It is possible to discern several factors that contribute to differences between groups.

First, the personalities of the leaders and the members of the groups have a great impact on the actual outcome of their interaction. Some leaders are more blessed with natural leadership qualities than others. The *mini-padres*, for example, take the lead in the meetings in a very self-assured manner. Many other community leaders are less experienced. A good illustration of these differences was the state of affairs in the community Brejo dos Santos. Although Olívia is the leader of this group for daily affairs, officially another woman - Juneide - is her co-leader. Juneide lives in the nearby village of Caetés and is its schoolteacher. I had been to several meetings where Olívia was the only leader present, and had always enjoyed the lively atmosphere and active participation of all. Olívia has the ability to involve everyone in the interpretation of the texts on the agenda. She also knows how to relate these texts to the ordinary life of community members. Then came the day that Juneide was also present at a meeting. As a practised schoolteacher, she took the lead right from the start of the meeting. Both Olívia and the other members of the CEB became shy in her presence. Disappointingly, Juneide was not able to create the animated atmosphere to which we were accustomed. Afterwards, Olívia complained to me about her co-leader, but during the meeting nobody contested the authority of the schoolteacher.

Another point that creates differences between groups is the ability to comprehend and discuss the texts in the *roteiro*. One leader may master the content of doctrinal texts better than another. Some restrict themselves to the *roteiro*, while others add their own contributions and interpretations or succeed in involving the participants in a discussion and arriving at a joint interpretation. Olívia for example, knows many stories from the Bible by heart, so even if she forgets her books, she can still chair a meeting.

In some cases, there is a distance between the group and its leaders. Juneide from Brejo dos Santos is no exception. I mentioned above the *mini-padres* who visit communities other than their own. They are not members of these communities and only drop in to preside over a religious meeting. Alberto is one of these. The strategy of the *mini-padres* means that they are treated with polite regard and placed on a pedestal by community members. They are seen as sources of religious knowledge, much like the priest is.⁴² Sometimes the *mini-padres* succeed in inspiring a community to organize, but they remain persons with authority and superior knowledge, different from the ordinary CEB members, and they never become real members - equal to the all others - in the groups they set up.

41 Record 901210-208

42 Religious specialists like *dona Severina* of *sítio Água Limpa* (Chapter 3) are also seen as a source of knowledge.

Some long-time activists apparently become so accustomed to life as a religious specialist that they sometimes have trouble with their double role, i.e. as one of 'the people' and as a 'religious specialist'. When during a diocesan meeting on political conscientization the discussion got out of hand, Paulo exclaimed "They are wrong, the people, not we who are already conscientized!". Although he is a poor man, his words reveal that he no longer considers himself one of the poor, because he "is rich of spirit". The people are the others. On this point, leaders of CEBs show some resemblance to the *basistas* involved in the CPT, the CIMI or the Catholic Students Union in town. However, these are not involved in CEBs.

Another point that merits consideration for the interaction within the groups is the gender of leaders. The data on the urban groups show a relationship between the gender of the leader and that of the participants. The three urban groups with only female members also have a female leader, while the three groups organized by males also attract male participants. In these male-led groups, male participation reaches an average of 35%. In the countryside, the data are less clear because participation is mixed in all groups, although there are indications that there, too, groups led by men attract more men.

In this respect, another observation struck me as significant: in the groups with a mixed membership, men take the lead, whereas in the groups with only female members, women feel more free and lose their shyness. Although women are credited with more aptitude for religion, within the groups men tend to exercise more power. Their higher social power outside the religious order seems to extend to the social relations within the groups. For the same reason, male leaders also become active on the extra-local level more easily. The only CEB leaders to have become active in politics are men.

In conclusion, leadership in the CEBs in Garanhuns is an ambiguous position for the laity involved. First, the leadership depends to a large extent on the initiatives and guidance on the part of the clergy. Professional pastoral agents are the founders of the groups and play an important role in their continuation, because without their support many lay leaders feel uncomfortable and unsure of themselves. Second, lay leaders encounter inspiration as well as obstacles on the path to giving form and meaning to the liberationist task they have accepted. When they become part of the small group of lay leaders in the parish, for many this is a supportive aspect of their activism. They encounter people with whom they can share their ideals and frustrations. However, being a leader also means standing in the spotlight, which sets limitations on their freedom of conduct. Third, the talents of lay leaders varied greatly. In all instances, gender and status proved to be important variables in the construction of the religious groups. In the following section, I will analyse the results of this with a special focus on the contents of liberationist Catholicism.

6.4 Mediating liberationist Catholicism

A practice approach involves the way actors confront and manipulate social and symbolic structures. Important structures were identified in the previous sections. The general gender ideology is one of these important structures. The Catholic Church with its hierarchical organization centred on the clergy is another. How do the lay actors in the parish confront and manipulate these structures? Or, more specifically, what do they do with liberationist

Catholicism in the context shaped by these structures? In Chapter 1, I pointed out that mediation is an activity not only of the clergy or *basistas*, but also of the laity. In this section, the mediation of the ideological discourse of liberationist Catholicism comes under scrutiny.⁴³

RECEPTION OF THE LIBERATIONIST DOCTRINE

When asked what motivated them to participate, only a minority of the members of base communities use words that reveal the influence of the liberationist discourse. This was the case in both the town and the countryside.⁴⁴ The aspect most often mentioned in answer to this question was 'the gospel'. Given the importance of the reading of biblical texts in group meetings, this answer may spring from the recent liberationist form of Catholicism. However, it is a very general answer that does not identify any specific part of the liberationist message as a decisive element in the discourse. The answer that comes closest to liberationist discourse is when people refer to the communal aspect of their group emphasizing the unity of the people of God. Often this goes hand in hand with the idea of serving the community and bringing the Word to others.⁴⁵ Only a few who collaborated in the survey used terminology related to their personal development. They said they want to learn more, and that they find good advice in the Word of God and the reflections on it in the meetings of their group.⁴⁶

Explicit reference to liberationist plans for the construction of a just society through social transformation is rare. The discourse on social struggle and class conflict in the *roteiros* and the preachings of the priest and the nuns in the neighbourhood is difficult for most members of base communities. The texts in the *roteiros* are often quite abstract, which makes them difficult to understand (cf. Mariz 1993). Especially women with little education, who are factually illiterate, often say that they "don't understand these things". Like Luiza, a member of the community of Brejo dos Santos, who answered my question about the activities of the women's group with: "And I know woman? I don't know how to answer this".⁴⁷ Not satisfied with this response, I pressed her further: "What do you talk about in the meetings?" She became almost irritated with my insistence. "You think that I know? When I go to these places, I don't see any talk".⁴⁸ She laughed a little, then continued: "They talk and say it's good for us. For the rights of women and well it's so much I don't understand".⁴⁹ Teresa, too, referred to the incomprehensibility of the liberationist discourse by comparing it to the things she heard in the various Protestant churches she used to frequent. She said:

I used to go to the churches of the believers⁵⁰ for a long time. (...) I always liked to go, I found that beautiful. It was more animated, there was more explication. I thought. Because the pastor, besides not being a priest but a person like us, but he explains good. He gives that explanation

43 Part of this section was also published in De Theije 1998.

44 Most leaders of base communities are more articulated in this respect.

45 "*É um serviço para a comunidade*" and "*devemos levar a palavra de Deus aos outros.*"

46 "*Dá conselhos a palavra*" and "*as reflexões nos ensina.*"

47 Interview 901005-162 / sheet 1: "*E eu sei mulher? Eu não sei não, responder isso.*"

48 Interview 901005-162 / sheet 1: "*Você pensa que eu sei? Que eu vou para esses cantos, eu não vejo é falar nada.*"

49 Interview 901005-162 / sheet 1: "*Fala... e... diz que é bom pra gente... Para os direitos da mulher e, é tanta coisa e eu não o...*"

50 Believers (in Portuguese, *crentes*) is the generalized term in Brazilian Portuguese for evangelicals, especially Pentecostals.

that the person understands, many explications that the priest doesn't give. And he explains it, you know. So I thought that was something more correct, they gave more explication than my own religion.⁵¹

Another reaction related to the liberationist discourse is inconvenience, especially with the emphasis on social struggle and political responsibility. The application of biblical knowledge to the here and now includes moral judgements of the behaviour of other people, especially the rich. In the here and now, people may be related to rich people or have them among their circle of acquaintances and patrons, or admire the rich people they know. For many of the faithful, this aspect of liberationist Catholicism contradicts the peacefulness that the Church preaches. In several cases, members of base communities rejected this aspect of their group meetings. Some attend Mass in other neighbourhoods because they do not like the one celebrated by Father Milton in their parish. Again, Teresa summarized the problem very clearly. Every Sunday she goes to Mass in the monastery because, as she put it: "There they talk only of God. The priest here talks of the whole neighbourhood. My God, he starts up on the hill and goes all the way to downtown".⁵² For her, the discourse of the priest is mere gossip, or as she also called it, "soap in the Church" (*novela na igreja*), and that is something that has nothing to do with God and her way of believing.

Teresa's words indicate an aspect in the reception of liberationist Catholicism that other researchers in Brazil have also highlighted. For many people living in harsh circumstances, the liberationist doctrine does not meet their wishes for and expectations of religious meaning. They want to hear words of comfort rather than a sermon on justice and injustice in society. In this respect, liberationist Catholicism represents a "disenchantment of the world" (Mariz 1993:26) that many faithful do not appreciate.

The political discourse of the liberationist campaign is not only difficult to understand and often inconvenient, but also almost infeasible. Iraci thought it was better not to try at all, "because the governments are far away"⁵³ (Cf. Caldeira 1984:207-215). As she perceived it, only God can save the world and all human endeavour is useless. The faithful who try to organize the fight for a better world encounter many practical problems. Even imagining activities that could contribute to societal change is hardly possible for most people.

The first step proposed in the liberationist doctrine is organization, and here the first obstacle reveals itself. Several CEB leaders complained about the parishioners' lack of interest in organizing. They indicated this absence of readiness to take action as an important source of poverty. Marisa said:

Wealth, God also gives it, but people must look for it, too. We cannot sit with crossed arms, waiting for God to send the money. It's in our hands, isn't it? Because I think he will not send it. We have to do something, too. It is a lack of union, too. (...) This is the weakness of poverty, still more.

51 Interview 910313-250 / sheet 22: "(...) com muito tempo, frequentei muito a igreja dos crentes. (...) Ai eu sempre tinha vontade, achava aquilo bonito. (questão: A Sra. achava mais bonito que aqui na igreja?) Era mais animada, mais explicação. Achava. Porque o pastor, além de não ser um padre, mas é uma pessoa assim, mas ele explica bem, dá aquela explicação, a pessoa entende o que ele ... muitas explicações que o padre não dá, mas ele explica, né. Explica mesmo. Então, eu achava aquilo, que era uma coisa mais correta, mais explicação do que a minha própria religião, sabe."

52 Interview 910313-250 / sheet 33: "Ali ele só fala em Deus, não fala noutra coisa. E o padre ali fala no bairro todinho o meu Deus, começa do almirante vai até no comércio."

53 Interview 910319-254 / sheet 4: "Porque os governos 'tão longe'."

Everyday worse, worse because of this, because they do not organize themselves. They do not have the courage to fight for their rights.⁵⁴

Even within her group (rua Arcoverde), she finds that many participants do not believe in the potential of organized action, despite the fact that many CEB members identify 'union' or 'organization' as an important aspect of their motivation to participate in the groups. In fact, apart from being mentioned in many personal conversations and interviews, the term 'union' was used by nine (out of 53) of the survey's respondents. The meaning of this concept was, however, largely symbolic. Indeed, how should this union be transformed into a social or political action group? Neither leaders nor members of the CEBs had clear-cut ideas on that. Confronted with questions on this topic, most people replied "I had no study" or made excuses in a similar vein in order to explain why they or their groups had no possibility to develop activities besides their weekly meetings.

Taking into account the powerless position of women in Brazilian society, this applies even more to the female members of base communities. Especially the call for social activism included in the liberationist interpretation of Catholicism creates serious problems for them. Women are not supposed to enter politics and they do not feel at ease with this kind of activity. Research in São Paulo on the role of women in contemporary Catholic lay groups also showed that women encounter with many difficulties if they try to put into practice the political project of liberation theology through developing more feminist activities (Drogus 1994, Alvarez 1990, Caldeira 1990).

A consequence of the pre-eminent presence of women is that the female members of the groups have a large impact on the form and content of the religious associations. This helps us to understand much of the actual shape and meaning of the groups under study. Liberationist Catholicism is largely carried out by women, but offers no specific discourse directed at women - that is, no discourse that resolves the contradictions between being a good wife and mother and a politically active person. The result is a Catholicism that contains considerable contradictions and ambiguities for its main actors. This ambiguity turns out to be a hindrance for the project of liberationist Catholicism.

Catholicism has always had a strong focus on the family. The clearest examples of this are the groups founded during the ultramontane campaign, such as the Apostleship of Prayer. This emphasis on morality and family life became far less central during the liberationist campaign. However, for the women involved in contemporary religious groups, family life is still their main point of reference, since it constitutes their whole environment (as the general gender system constantly reminds them). The questions of morality that the women again and again introduce in the discussion show that they still consider this an important element of the religious.

This simple fact has several consequences. First, the preponderance of women in the composition of the groups, in combination with the liberationist 'technique' of relating the Bible to ordinary life, results in an introduction of family affairs into the discussions and rituals by the women themselves. Second, the discourse offered in the *roteiros* does

54 Interview 900823-122 / sheet 12: "*Porque às vezes a riqueza é... é Deus que dá também, mas também a gente tem que buscar, não é? A gente não deve ficar de braços cruzados, esperando que Deus mande os pacotes de dinheiro, na mão da gente, né. Que eu acho que ele não manda. A gente tem também de se esforçar. E um pouco de falta de união também.(...) Ai é isso o fracasso da pobreza, mais ainda. Cada dia pior, pior por isso. Porque eles não se organizam. Eles não tem coragem de lutarem não, pelos seus direitos.*"

not provide women with much to hold on to. Therefore, the women are obliged to try to find a way to reconcile the liberationist 'theory' with their daily practice. Because there is little or no supervision of what happens in group meetings, they have all the freedom to do so. Since all participants were 'born' Catholics, they fall back on general Catholic rituals and meanings, such as saying the rosary. In this respect, the popularity of the RCC prayer meetings can be explained by referring to the role model it offers women. Marian devotion takes a central place in these meetings. Although most women said they found the way of worshipping strange at first, this central place of Mary might fit in more easily with a female world-view as compared to a discourse oriented towards social and political struggle.

The incomprehensibility, inconvenience and infeasibility of the liberationist project for the female participants of the CEBs sets the women the task of making sense out of contradicting and ambiguous religious elements. They see themselves confronted with inconsistencies and situational incompatibility (Moore 1975:216, Turner 1967:196). Turner described situational incompatibility as the difference between ideal norms and real behaviour. An additional problem for the women in CEBs is that the 'ideal norm' is unequivocal. The indeterminacy (Moore 1975:219) thus created results in a process I will call a 'gendered mediation' of what a CEB should be like. The liberation theology discourses and symbols are attributed form and meaning suited to the experiences of the female members of the groups. The main features of this 'CEB in practice' are discussed in the following pages.

LIBERATIONIST CATHOLICISM REINTERPRETED

For most participants, Catholicism as it is lived out in base communities is primarily a devotional activity. In many groups in which I participated, the emphasis was more on reading the Bible and praying than on reflection and linking the texts to daily life or social injustice. Many participants told me they attend the meetings because "it is religion, and everything that deals with religion is good". Many are more interested in saying the rosary than in political discussion. People do what they think is best, and because of the lack of clerical supervision they have all the room to do so.

Augusta and her husband, *senhor* Edivaldo, explained their motivation for becoming involved in the CEB of *sítio* Água Limpa. Their love for God, prayer and the Bible is a given fact. They participate in all religious happenings in the vicinity. This means they always attend the meetings of the CEB, organized by João. When *dona* Severina organizes her *terços* every May (Chapter 3), they are present, too. They also go to the nearby community of *sítio* Verde whenever the priest says a Mass in the small chapel there, and occasionally they attend the Sunday Mass in Garanhuns. Sometimes, on their own initiative they organize a meeting to say the rosary with their neighbours, or invite Neuza (who is a *rezadeira*) from the same *sítio* to "pray on" them.⁵⁵ They had forgotten when exactly João started the meetings, but told me that they had joined him right at the beginning. "We'll only leave it when we die, please God!"⁵⁶ Edivaldo had built a small altar in their house, and everyday they pray before it. They often pray during their work, too. Religion

55 Interview 901112-176 / sheet 21/22: "*De vez em quando ela faz reza 'neu, para nós'*"

56 Interview 901112-176 / sheet 2: "*Só é de deixar quando morrer, se Deus quiser*".

is an important part of life, permeating all other spheres. Therefore, seeking an explication of motives for religious action is a nonsensical thing to do.

The members of urban CEBs gave much the same reasons for participating. They "like to participate", "like the gospel", "love God" or "love the word of the Bible". Some said they "thought it was good", or they "enjoy hearing the Word of God". Others explained that they feel the desire "to follow the Word of God" or simply stated that they "have much faith".⁵⁷ All these explications refer to general religious sentiments and beliefs. This is also the case when people express their feelings in terms of a duty every Christian has to fulfil. "It is an obligation every Christian has",⁵⁸ several people assured me. Some CEB members described their involvement and motivation in more personalized terms: "God called me", or "I have a vocation for participation".⁵⁹ These verbalizations of the reasons for participating refer to general ideas about religion, belief in God, and participation in rituals and other devotional practices. They may be of all times and places. At first sight, they reveal no significant differences between men and women, nor do they contain an explicit liberationist content.

These expressions of motivation are more than different ways of putting customary practice into words. Established practices can have an important impact on individual life courses, too. To be a member of a base community gives people a feeling of belonging to a group, and this is important for individuals who often have a marginal position in society as a whole. It means taking part in the Catholic Church, an organization with power and prestige, as Castro (1987:143) pointed out in his book on CEBs in Recife. Furthermore, habitual behaviour may also acquire new meanings. This is the case when prayer meetings turn into arenas for political conscientization, or when a woman finds an outlet for her difficulties at home. Clearly, participation in a base community may have different effects for different actors. In the following three parts of this section, I will highlight the most general themes I found, namely locality, unity and helping others.

LOCAL SITUATION

What is probably the most characteristic of liberationist Catholicism as it is practised in these base communities is that it draws attention to local circumstances. Through the discussion of Bible texts and information offered in the leaflets, participants are repeatedly incited to connect historical knowledge of larger structures to their own lives. Of course, this was the intention of the campaign. Thus, at the meetings people talk about the problems they have to face in order to keep the household going, just as the poor in Jesus' time experienced. They discuss the lack of potable water in the neighbourhood or the basic commodities that become more expensive every day. Often the discussion starts at a general level. One man said: "Hunger is the worst thing there is. There may be war, illness and all, but hunger is the worst".⁶⁰ Someone else asked if injustice is not worse. The man answered that the cause of hunger lies in injustice.⁶¹ Then someone else said that everybody

57 "Gosta", "gosto do evangelho / de Deus / da palavra da bíblia", "acho bom (ouvir a palavra de Deus)", "tenho vontade de seguir a palavra de Deus", "tenho muita fé em Deus".

58 "É obrigação de cristão".

59 "Deus me chamou" and "Tenho vocação para participar".

60 Record 900826-124 : "Fome é o pior que tem. Pode ter guerra, doença e tudo, mas fome é o pior."

61 Record 900826-124 : "mas a fome tem por causa a injustiça."

is waiting for the mayor to take some measures, to better the situation, thus returning the discussion to the local situation.

Discussions like this betray the influence of liberationist discourse and doctrine on the religious. However, more often than not there is no continuation of such sessions. This limited interpretation of liberationist Catholicism finds its causes in the mediation of the message. As I pointed out above, the doctrine is difficult to comprehend, is inconvenient and seems infeasible to many members of base communities. Therefore, people seldom take the step proposed by liberationist intellectuals and clergy, i.e. to organize a social movement to change daily hardships. This is not to say that the discussions during meetings of base communities are without any meaning. I will give an example.

In August, readings and discussions are based on the theme 'vocation'. In 1990, when the Lent campaign initiated a year of special attention to the lives of women, the approach of the theme of the month was focussed on the vocation of women. In the community of Brejo dos Santos, this led to a discussion of the different roles of men and women in daily life. Various rather animated observations were made, for example, they educate boys and girls differently, and men do not do anything in the house. Joana confessed that she used to fetch water for all her grown-up sons so that they could take a bath. This meant walking several hundred metres with cans filled with water balanced on her head. She agreed that her sons were in much better shape to carry the water, but said that this is the way things are.

Even when the theme proposed in the *roteiro* is not directly related to the position of women, due to their overwhelming majority at the meetings, women often put questions related to this on the agenda. They do this not for feminist reasons, but because they talk about their children who are growing up in an environment of violence, or about husbands who only criticize the way they run the household, or about the neighbour who is ill and needs their help. In most groups, 'women's problems' - or at least, the female points of view - enter the scene in this way. This may be an (extra) reason why men do not become members, because what happens in the groups has less to do with their lives and situations.

Catholicism as it is practised in the base communities in Garanhuns pays no explicit attention to the ambiguous values and double standards with respect to womanhood in contemporary society. A new role for women is implicitly proclaimed by liberation theology. However, this 'political' role is very difficult to put into practice because the general ideas in society change only very slowly. One result is that the activities of the local base communities remain largely within the boundaries set by traditional values concerning women's good conduct.

UNITY

Another central theme in the local elaboration of liberationist Catholicism is the notion of unity. As I mentioned before, this word is used very often by the members of the base communities. In fact, unity is an important value in the overall culture. With regard to personal and individual behaviour, this is expressed in the ideal of not living in discord with anybody. Irací and her husband, who are both in their sixties, used this in their explanation of their economic situation. They are poor but "Thanks to God, we have the scorn of nobody," Irací said. Her husband added: "No, you see, we have no adversaries here, nowhere."

Look, I owe not a dime to anybody here".⁶² Generally, *falta de união* (lack of unity) in the family or between neighbours is considered a serious moral problem.

In the community, quarrels and feuds are a major preoccupation. The topic was mentioned by many people. Most participants emphasized that the religious meetings have eliminated much discord in the community. Old feuds have been resolved and the smaller problems have become less pressing. Since João had started to preach in the community of Água Limpa, the unity in that hamlet had been restored because old feuds had been resolved. Also disturbances of everyday life had decreased:

Sometimes the girls have quarrels with each other, because of a boyfriend, these things. Then we discuss this, talk about love, and the quarrels end. Nobody lives in discord anymore. Everybody can walk together, pray together. If there is any problem, young people become adversaries. But the youngsters here in the community, all people are united. They drink, play, a slap here, a slap there (...) Nobody sees any disunion here, thanks to God.⁶³

The term 'unity' may have different meanings for the laity. The differences between the groups and the faithful involved became apparent when Josivalda and her group, the rua Velha CEB, started a campaign to raise money for a paralytic girl who lived on rua Velha. The child was very sick and had been confined to bed. It was clear to all that her days were numbered. Josivalda thought that a television set would make the child's life nicer, and she launched a plan to collect money to buy one. She felt that this was a form of the community working together for the benefit of others, and that this was unity.

Before she went out to ask the support of the local radio station, Josivalda informed Father Milton of her plans. He did not like the idea and offered to lend her a television, because the girl would soon die. Josivalda did not accept his plan. She thought the community should not depend on the priest, but should unite to solve its own problems. She then went to talk with Marisa, the leader of the other group in her street. Marisa did not like the plan either. In her opinion, television "does not give life to anybody".⁶⁴ If it had been for another goal, she would have joined Josivalda's campaign, but with this aspiration she thought that "not even God was pleased with the endeavour".⁶⁵ The refusal of both Father Milton and Marisa to join the campaign led to much discussion in the groups. For some weeks, there was no unity at all. However, with a small group of sympathizers, Josivalda carried out her plan and raised enough money to buy a television. Although the girl died a month later, Josivalda had demonstrated that she had learned that poor people have the strength to set their goals and achieve something if they combine forces. For her, this was an important, religiously inspired action.

The concept of unity is closely related to the interpretation of 'community' in general. The liberationist doctrine presents the idea of community as a necessary step towards

62 Record 910319-254 / sheet 15: Irací: "Graças a Deus nós temos indiferença com ninguém." Husband: "Não, ohe, não temos um intrigado aqui, em canto nenhum. Olhe, não deve uma ruela a ninguém aqui."

63 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 28-9: "Às vezes uma moça fica diferente com a outra, por causa de namoro, essas coisas, aí a gente pega pregando, falando sobre o amor e aquilo ali vai se acabar. Ninguém vive mais intrigado. Pode andar todo mundo junto, rezando ... Quando há qualquer um problema, o jovem fica intrigado um do outro. Agora os jovens aqui na comunidade, aqui a gente é tudo unido. Bebe, brinca, tapa vai, tapa vem. (...), ninguém vê mais de união aqui não, graças a Deus."

64 Interview 910219-226 / sheet 5: "... não dá vida a ninguém..."

65 Interview 910219-226 / sheet 6: "Nem Deus se agradou desse esforço."

the construction of a better world and, ultimately, the coming of the Kingdom of God. The poor are to form this community. In local groups, the conception of community is more restricted. People perceive the community as the congregation of neighbours who pray, worship and live together. Olívia explained:

Every place is a community. However, it is only a [real] community if you take part in the life of the community. Because, look, you live in Garanhuns. That neighbourhood is probably a community, but it only becomes a community when you participate in it. If you live only in your house, only for yourself, you do not know whether it is a community. Community is the individual united, working with others, not wanting to do things alone. It is doing things together, communicating with each other.⁶⁶

CEBs are close-knit congregational units which satisfy the desire for unity.⁶⁷ The religious meaning of the community is in the assembly of equals, in being and working together.

When I asked Olívia what kind of works a community does, she answered:

Well, the type of things we have to do together in the community is first of all to meet with the people, and then start with an action, a work, like when we make a communal fund. Let's say we go to some place and there is a poor person and we think about helping that poor one. Well then, I alone cannot resolve that. So I have to talk, together with the people, to see if we have the possibility to resolve it together. Thus, when we unite, do the work together, then it is communitarian work. But when it is a work of only one person, it is not.⁶⁸

With so much emphasis on unity with others, it is no wonder that less emphasis is given to the political project inferred in the theories of liberation theology. The concrete project of fighting for political and social justice is relegated to the background. This way, the process of mediation resolves the problems people find in the liberationist discourse. Controversies are also avoided. The focus on unity in the local group fits very well with women's perception of their interests.

The mediation process has a further important consequence: the difference between base communities and other religious groups is small. Castro (1987:144) also found this in Recife. CEBs integrate easily with other groups, such as the *Apostolado*. The quite general conception of the words 'unity' and 'community' is not limited to CEBs. The perception of 'community' by members of the RCC, for instance, is quite similar. Irací, a member of the Charismatic movement since its inception, said:

The only way this world could become a good world is if everybody lived in a community, if everybody lived in prayer groups, everybody participated in the groups, these things, everything would be different.⁶⁹

66 Interview 901005-164 / sheet 6 : *"Em todo lugar é uma comunidade, agora só comunidade se a gente participar da vida da comunidade. Porque, oh, você mora em Garanhuns, quer dizer que aquele bairro que você mora, provavelmente é uma comunidade, mas ela só se torna comunidade, você participar da vida da comunidade. Se você viver só na sua casa, só para você, você não sabe se é uma comunidade, né. Comunidade é a pessoa unida, trabalhar junto com os outros, não querer fazer as coisas sozinho. É fazer as coisas em comum, conversando uns com os outros."*

67 Stoll (1993a:5) argues that Catholicism does not offer congregational experience. I believe he is mistaken in this.

68 Interview 901005-164 / sheet 6 : *"Olha, o tipo de coisas que a gente tem que fazer juntos na comunidade: primeira coisa é se reunir com o povo, né: depois partir para uma ação, assim, um trabalho, como se a gente vai fazer uma caixa comunitária, vamos dizer que a gente vai num lugar e tem uma pessoa pobre e a gente pensa em ajudar aquele pobre, aí eu sozinha, eu não posso resolver, eu sozinha, então eu tenho que falar, juntar com o povo, pra gente ver se dá pra gente resolver juntos. Aí então, se a gente se reunir, fazer o trabalho junto, é um trabalho comunitário, agora se for o trabalho de uma só pessoa, é um trabalho incomum."*

69 Interview 910319-254 / sheet 17 : *"Que o mundo só ficava um mundo bom se fosse todo mundo vivesse em comunidade, todo mundo vivesse em grupo de oração, todo mundo fosse participar dos grupos, dessas coisas, as coisas eram diferentes."*

Her words show that the idea of community is a meaningful symbol for charismatics, too. 'Community' signifies a group of worshippers praying and praising together. The group of people Iraci means is not limited to her charismatic prayer group. She uses the word for the community of faithful Catholics. Of these, the Charismatics are of course the ones who convert words into actions, since they form prayer groups.

The Charismatics are also worried about the unity of the Church. At a city-wide meeting held on Pentecost, much emphasis was given to the fact that the charismatic ideals may be different from other currents in Catholicism, but that the Church is one. Several speakers emphasized that divisions in the Church make no sense "because the Lord is the same".⁷⁰

Thus, unity is a central theme in the discourse of all groups. It is also something to work for. In fact, there should have been more unity among the lay activists, as many of them remarked. This unity is difficult to achieve because humans have their faults. For example, some always want to command others, as Teresa said.⁷¹ Simultaneously, the unity already achieved forms a basic element of the religious groups.

HELPING OTHERS

The last theme, one which recurred over and over again in the explanations of the CEB members, is helping others. The focus on local affairs combined with the emphasis on unity goes together with an interest in the needs of those in the vicinity of the community members. It suffices to recall the motivation of Olívia of Brejo dos Santos to help Márcia and her family, by providing them with some food each week (Chapter 3). Although Márcia was not a participant in the meetings of the *sítio's* base community, Olívia considered her part of the community and felt that all had the obligation to help this needy family.

According to most group participants, helping others is a viable response to the call for action in liberationist Catholicism. In fact, it is an important element in all contemporary lay groups. The recently founded Legion of Mary collapsed because the group's members found it ridiculous that, according to the rules of the Legion, they could not give food or medicine to the poor people they visited. In the conception of most religiously active parish members, the preferential option for the poor is translated into providing charity. In this respect, the practice of CEBs does not differ much from the customs in other religious groups.

6.5 Conclusion: shared liberationist Catholicism

In this chapter, the practice of the base communities in the parish of São Vicente was analysed. In many respects the campaign to promote CEBs was a success. Most members of lay groups are CEB members. These groups are mostly self-sufficient in religious affairs. They have their own regular meetings and in several cases also organize other events. To put it briefly, the liberationist campaign has succeeded in mobilizing the laity in the parish. Many lay people consider the base communities in their parish a viable option for religious involvement.

However, the understandings of liberationist Catholicism by the laity in the parish are not exactly in line with the proposals made by *basistas* and liberationist intellectuals.

⁷⁰ Record 900603-77.

⁷¹ Interview 910313-250 / sheet 34.

On the contrary, the process of mediation resulted in a specific form and content of the groups. Several social and symbolic constraints set the context for this mediation.

First, I found that the liberationist doctrine is subject to a gendered mediation in day-to-day parish life. The prevailing gender ideologies and gendered actors largely shape the actual form and meaning of the CEBs in São Vicente, especially in the urban part of the parish. Gender ideology is instrumental in the construction of base communities and is the cause of the great diversity within and between CEBs. The parishioners attracted to the CEBs were mostly women. This contributed to the specific form and meaning of the groups in the parish. The numerical preponderance of women turns the meetings into gatherings focused on women's affairs. At the same time, restrictions imposed by general gender ideology cause these women to prefer to avoid political action. Men in the lay groups tend to stress that they are not *machão* now that they have become involved in religion. In the process of constructing a religious community, these actors thus also shape and reshape a specific gender ideology.

Second, aspects related to leadership in the parish and in the groups were shown to both offer opportunities for and impose limitations on the construction of meaningful religious groups. The position of the priest and lack of time to guide the groups influenced the specific outcome of the group formation in the parish. Furthermore, leadership also develops along gendered interpretations of religious tasks. The roles and responsibilities of male and female leaders differ, as do their possibilities and chances to fulfil such a role.

Practice theory focuses on the way actors confront and manipulate social and symbolic structures, even when these structures constrain them. The actions of the members and leaders of the CEBs in the parish of São Vicente are based on their understandings of liberationist influences and Catholicism in general. Some aspects of the liberationist campaign cause problems, such as the incomprehensibility and infeasibility of the doctrine, and are therefore adapted in the process of mediation. In conclusion, the fate of liberationist doctrine is determined by this process. I believe the evidence in this chapter shows that since liberationist Catholicism has no specific answer to the contradictions between the general gender ideology and the ideals of liberationist Catholic activity, women are obliged to adapt the doctrine to their own possibilities and wishes.

What, then, is the outcome of this process of mediation in terms of meanings and practices in relation to the lay groups? According to Reeves (1995:306), the question should also be: "What do actors want?" In the parish of São Vicente, the members of CEBs want to be involved in religious activities. Within the liberationist Catholic context, they have chosen compassion for the poor and charity as relevant religious acts. They also seek unity and cooperation with their co-religionists, and as a result try to avoid the problematic aspects of liberationist Catholicism.

This suggests that the liberationist campaign has not changed the 'consciousness' of the laity to the extent and in the direction that it proposes. In the following chapter, I will go further into this question through an analysis of the fate of the political contents of liberationist Catholicism.

7 Constituting political practice

This chapter will take politics as a central point of analysis. The main reason for this focus is that politics is a core element in the doctrine of liberationist Catholicism. The form and content of the political engagement preached in the campaign also represent a striking break with other campaigns in Catholicism, because it aimed to bridge the gap between the religious and the secular realm.

The heart of the matter for this book is, of course, the result of the constraints and opportunities relevant to the liberationist campaign. The goal of the liberationist campaign of cultural politics was to transform the consciousness of Catholics. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on the relation between the public symbolic order and the mediation of liberationist ideas and practices by lay actors. In other words, attention will be on the peculiarities of the mediation process and its outcomes. Therefore, a central endeavour is to gain insight into the connections between the liberationist campaign and the social and symbolic structures in the parish. This will be related to the religious practices and beliefs of the laity. Together and in their interconnectivity these form the local religious order. Consequently, I will focus on the mediation of politics, the political influence and the decisiveness of base communities and other lay groups, such as the charismatic prayer group.

Politics and political relations and activism can be understood in various ways. First, they exist on different levels. Are we talking about the religious influence on national political parties, or the participation of the faithful in local parties or social movements? Second, the realm of action may differ, too. Is the attention directed to the secular, or limited to the religious community? Then again, different levels may be looked at. What is under study - democracy in the Catholic church as a whole or the power relations in local lay groups? The liberationist doctrine and the campaign to propagate it are not univocal with respect to the level at which it should be worked out, nor about forms and meanings of the political content of liberationist Catholicism. A third manner in which to approach politics emerges here. In the setting of contemporary Brazilian Catholicism, politics has gained a special status as a sort of key symbol of liberationist Catholicism, around which many theological and pastoral discussions revolve. We must also address this aspect of the political. In contemporary Brazil, the relation between religion and politics is a much discussed topic, not only by social scientists but also the media. Politics is also a recurrent theme in the campaign of liberationist Catholicism. In the previous chapters, it was touched upon several times. I criticized in Chapter 2 the unbalanced centrality of the question of the political results of the liberationist campaign in the studies of Catholicism, and sketched in Chapter 4 the historical context of the political project of the liberationist campaign.

To be able to appreciate all aspects of liberationist Catholicism in the parish of São Vicente, in this chapter I will use a broad notion of 'politics'. First, this broad understanding of 'politics' provides room to do justice to the ethnographical reality, including the symbolic role of 'politics' in the campaign of liberationist Catholicism. Second, it draws attention to the core of the theoretical approach pursued in this book. Ortner (1989a:195) uses the term 'political' for all actions that are important in a practice approach, i.e. those that teach us about human activity in relation to a symmetry and structure. In her view, politics comprises all aspects of the negotiation and definition of power, agency and legitimacy that are part of interaction and relationships, at both the individual and the collective level.

Analogous to my argument for the definition of religion, I prefer not to draw strict boundaries around the concept. Consequently, I too use the term 'the political'. Because of this theoretical connotation of the term, politics is always just around the corner, also in the religious culture under study here.

In this chapter, I will proceed as follows. In the first section I will offer a closer look at the public symbolic order and address the involvement of institutional Catholicism in both internal and external political fights. I will also analyse the relation between the public symbolic order and the diocese of Garanhuns. In the second section, I will discuss these varied ways 'politics' is mediated in the religious practice of the CEBs and other religious groups in the parish. This will raise further questions regarding the influence of the cultural politics put forward in the liberationist campaign.

In the third and fourth sections, I will turn to the lay actors in the parish. How are the liberationist ideas diffused and understood in the lay groups of the parish of São Vicente? The third section will concentrate on ritual practice. In the day-to-day practice, rituals prove to be powerful vehicles for the campaign. In the fourth section this analysis will be further worked out for the organization of the religious in the parish and the lay groups.

Finally, in the fifth section I will focus on the 'consciousness' of lay actors. As I explained, the aim of the liberationist campaign was *conscientização*. The result of the mediation and reinterpretation of the liberationist message in the religious practice in the parish must therefore be considered in the light of this liberationist goal. Data from several communitarian actions will provide ground for an exploration of the interconnections between the liberationist campaign and the meaning-making of the laity. The evidence offered in this chapter will be a further underpinning of the conclusions reached in Chapter 6. Again unity, locality and helping others are recurring themes.

7.1 The public symbolic order

The links between the propagators of the liberationist ideals and the people involved in the desired religious change are established in various contexts. The religious practice in the parish is one of these. All other contexts are literally 'further away' from the laity. The public symbolic order will manifest itself above all in these 'further away' contexts, such as the media or the institutional church at the national level. At the level of the diocese, we are likely to find mediation of the public symbolic order in the policy formulated and carried out by the *basistas* and the clergy. Several questions are then to be answered. First, of course, what are the important characteristics of the public symbolic order? Which ideas and symbols are used? Second, and more particularly, what is the role of politics in it? Finally we must analyse what impact the public symbolic order has on the local religious groups.

My observations at the diocesan assembly in 1989 (Chapter 1) revealed different opinions on the political task of Catholicism. The same happened at the next *assembléia diocesana*, at the end of November 1990. This time there were no national elections. Lula, the candidate of the PT, had lost the second round in December 1989 and Brazil was still recovering from the shock caused by the financial measures taken eight months earlier by President Collor. Given the election's disturbance of the 1989 *assembléia*, this time the meeting was planned for after the elections for governors and deputies in

October and November. Nevertheless, politics was an important ingredient of the discussions in the seminary building. This time, however, hope did not characterize the atmosphere as it had the year before. On the contrary, the organizers had planned a wake one evening "to remember the victims of the struggle of the poor".

In this section, I will present three cases that illustrate the features of politics and political conflict in the religious. The first is the involvement of the *assessor* of the assembly in an extremely severe conflict between the archbishop of Olinda and Recife and a priest of that diocese, the priest of the parish of Morro da Conceição in Recife. The second case goes into the problem of violence and opposition brought about by the political practice of liberationist clergy in the diocese of Garanhuns. Father Marcelo, the priest of Quipapá, was threatened because of his involvement with the union of sugar-cane workers. In the third case, 'the victims of the struggle of the poor' are the poor themselves. The laity involved in liberationist Catholicism in the diocese encountered severe opposition from the local secular powers.

VICTIMS OF CHURCH POLITICS

One 'victim' whose case was discussed at the diocesan assembly of 1990 was Father Luís, the *assessor* from Recife mentioned in the description of the previous year's assembly. Father Luís clashed with Dom José Cardoso, who had succeeded Dom Hélder Câmara as Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, and had tried to expel Father Luís from the diocese because of his involvement in several liberationist pastoral groups and his open critical stance with regard to the bishop's policy. As a foreigner (a Dutchman), his position was awkward.¹ However, as a member of the Redemptorist order he could count on the protection of his superiors. The highest Redemptorist authorities had disregarded the petition of Dom José to take disciplinary measures against their priest.

The account of the *assessor* centred on the events that had taken place in the parish of Morro da Conceição the previous year. The priest of this parish, Father Reginaldo Veloso, had been dismissed and suspended from his sacerdotal duties in December the year before. This had caused much unrest, not only in the Morro² but the whole region. Father Reginaldo was a critic of the bishop of Olinda and Recife and in previous years had "tried the bishop's patience" in many ways (Nagle 1997:78). Finally, in December 1989, Dom José suspended him on the grounds of disobedience to his superior and inciting the laity to act against church authority. Father Luís was among the many religious people to protest against the measure taken by the archbishop.³

What happened in the Morro parish was not an isolated case. The archbishop of Olinda and Recife had already established his reputation as a 'conservative' since taking over from Dom Hélder Câmara in 1985. The closure of the seminary in 1989 and the dismantlement of several diocesan and regional pastoral groups, such as the CPT, had shown that he was serious in his policy to restore ecclesial authority at the expense of

1 Several foreign religious had already been expelled from the archdiocese.

2 The Morro is the abbreviated name for the parish, and literally means 'hill'. There are a lot of neighbourhoods on hills in Recife, but during this episode the Morro da Conceição became *the* Morro.

3 Already in December 1989 eighty-two priests in the archdiocese of Olinda and Recife had published a letter in the Pernambucan newspapers protesting about the policy of the Archbishop. On several occasions, many clergy showed their disapproval by boycotting official celebrations presided over by Dom José Cardoso and by participating in protest manifestations.

lay autonomy and the involvement of the church in secular affairs. The conflict with the priest at the Morro was a case in a row that had started several years before. However, because of the prominence of both the community of the Morro da Conceição and the reputation of its priest,⁴ as well as the vicious denouement of the conflict and the attention the media gave it, 'the Morro' became the symbol of the struggle of liberationist Catholics in the Northeast.

Some background data are important in order to understand the impact of the suspension of Father Reginaldo. In the Morro, there is a pilgrimage site of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception that attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. In the eyes of the bishop, Father Reginaldo had over the years turned this pilgrimage into a political event. The Father invited political activists from all over the country to preach and had installed a large billboard on the hill, which he also used for other than directly church-related messages. During the presidential elections of 1989 it said:

Think before you vote. Are you a boss or a worker? Of the candidates for president, which is a boss and which is a worker? Will you vote for the boss? (Nagle 1997:78).

In fact, what Father Reginaldo did openly was what many other priests did in their sermons and contacts with the faithful. Yet because he did it so openly, he attracted much attention and the bishop heaped scorn on his work and that of the community of the Morro da Conceição.

The events that followed the suspension of Father Reginaldo reveal the harshness of the opposition between different interpretations of the social task of Catholicism. In September 1990, the laity of the Morro da Conceição closed the church and refused to hand over the key to the successor to Father Reginaldo, Father Constante.⁵ The response of the archbishop was to call in the military police. A battalion of forty officers appeared at the Morro, along with the new priest, and broke open the doors of the church and the parish house. For several weeks after, the military remained at the door of the church. The archbishop could not have given clearer evidence of his determination to restore authority in the church of Olinda and Recife.

Dom José Cardoso's policy should be seen as part of the so-called conservative reaction to liberationist Catholicism. From 1985 onwards, the support for the liberationist interpretation of pastoral work had waned throughout the country. Internationally, the church shifted its policy towards restoring obedience to the 'infallible' teaching authority of the Pope and the uniformity of the ecclesial organization and cult (Della Cava 1992:176-183). One aspect of this development was the appointment of bishops who were more dedicated to restoring the authority of the church than to experiments with the democratization of the Catholic faith. The nomination of Dom José Cardoso to replace Dom Hélder Câmara was part of the changed policy of the Roman Curia (Cf. Smith 1991). On the level of doctrine and ideology, the fight revolved around the perceived opposition between politics and religion. Therefore, the measures against Father Reginaldo had many repercussions in the church of the Northeast. 'Politics' - in the sense of an option

4 In 1973 Father Reginaldo was kidnapped by the military for criticizing the regime (Nagle 1997:65-6). In 1980 he was again imprisoned, this time for writing a song protesting against the deportation of the Italian priest Father Vito Miracapillo from the parish of Ribeirão in the *Zona da Mata* (Miracapillo 1985:134).

5 Since Father Reginaldo's dismissal in December 1989, the church had been under the direction of the laity of the parish council and the CEBs.

of religious people and an engagement with the poor - was a key symbol in the opposition between 'conservatives' and 'liberationists'. These discussions had considerable impact on the *basistas* in the diocese of Garanhuns.

However, liberationist Catholicism was strongly rooted in Recife, and many priests, pastoral agents and lay people resisted the pressure from the diocesan authorities, as evidenced by the many protests that followed the events on the Morro da Conceição. The 'new model of church' defended by Father Reginaldo and his cronies continued to challenge the 'conservative turn' in the global church and the social status quo in many dioceses. At the wake at the *assembléia* in Garanhuns, this was illustrated by the general indignation about the events in Recife. It was also evidenced by the other stories told at the occasion, referring to events that took place in Garanhuns.

VIOLENCE IN DAY-TO-DAY POLITICAL PRACTICE

In the context of the secular world, politics takes on a more mundane and concrete face in the confrontation with the social and economic elite. Another 'victim' of repression prayed for at the wake was Father Marcelo of the diocese of Garanhuns. In his case, the landed elite were the opposition. The threats were also more severe, because they were to his life. Father Marcelo was the priest of Quipapá (the most southeastern parish of the diocese), which is located in the middle of the sugar-cane zone. Traditionally, this area is imbued with social conflicts brought about by the insecure and harsh circumstances the sugar-cane workers have to endure in order to earn a living.⁶

Besides being a priest, Father Marcelo is also a lawyer and he helped the pastoral groups of the diocese, such as the CPT and the CDH, with legal aid whenever such was necessary. Often the cases he treated were land conflicts or involved labour disputes. Among his clients were the unions of sugar-cane workers. He had recently defended the Palmares rural workers' union (*Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Palmares*) in a conflict over salaries, and had received a series of threats.⁷ One day during the assembly, a rumour spread that the priest would soon be killed by a *pistoleiro* (hired gunman) whom a landowner had already paid.

Although such rumours pop up frequently and often prove to be false, the bishop and the coordination team took this one very seriously. The informant who gave the information to Dom Tiago was also a lawyer and a member of the elite of Garanhuns. His social position meant that his decision to warn the bishop was unusual. The man was, however, also a member of the local *Cursilho* and this explained his worries about the well-being of the priest. In fact, his roots in a part of society that is generally seen as an adversary of liberationist Catholicism seemed to make the leaders of the diocese take his denunciation seriously.

Local history had already shown that the political involvement of the church was a perilous venture. In the Northeast it is quite common for political adversaries to be killed, and the people in Garanhuns were well aware of this. In the previous years, Dom Tiago

6 See Scheper-Hughes 1992 for a vivid description of the conditions of life in a Pernambucan town in the *zona da mata*. See May 1996 for an analysis of rural conflicts, the violence involved and the Catholic institutional response to it.

7 Palmares is a neighbouring diocese of the parish of Quipapá. The social and economic situation of this diocese in the *zona da mata* shows more resemblance to that in Quipapá than the general situation of the diocese of Garanhuns, which is predominantly situated in the *agreste*.

himself had been the target of several attacks, as had several community leaders who had become political activists within their municipality.

In April 1990, the priest of the parish of São Vicente, Father Milton, became the target of threats. A sermon by this priest in the church of Caetés had provoked the anger of the municipality's prefect. In his sermon, Father Milton had accused the local government of paying teachers at the municipal schools an inadequate salary. Here, 'inadequate' means a quarter of the official minimum salary. The teachers were starting to organize and wanted to begin protest actions. Father Milton openly gave his support to the teachers, and a few days later received an anonymous letter saying that the politicians of Caetés were plotting an attack. The letter caused much commotion, aggravated by the fact that some relatives of the town's mayor were also involved in the CEBs. A few days later, some men known to be *pistoleiros* approached a brother of the priest and inquired about the whereabouts of the priest. At this point, fear turned into terror. A group of people close to Father Milton decided to take measures. For several weeks, the priest never travelled alone, nor in his own car.⁸

Fortunately, nothing happened and the fear for the life of Father Milton gradually faded. In Father Marcelo's case, however, it took longer for the dark clouds to pass. Shortly after he had been threatened, the president of the sugar-cane workers union, who was only twenty-six, was brutally murdered;⁹ then, a week later, the police inspector who was investigating the murder also was killed. Father Marcelo decided to leave the country. He stayed in France for three years before returning to Garanhuns.

These events show that liberationist practice may provoke severe opposition in Brazilian society. Where the religious and the political begin to mix, problems arise. Of course, the events in Garanhuns are just one of many possible examples. Every year, several priests and lay activists die in the struggle for a just society (see e.g. CPT NE 1994). The participants at the wake were well aware of this, which meant that the evidence presented was loaded with a general feeling of despair and helpless anger. The cause as such was not questioned.

AGAINST INJUSTICE IN GARANHUNS

The stories told at the assembly's wake distracted the participants from the theme of the meeting - the evaluation of the *caminhada* of the church - and engendered much anxiety. The 'victims of the struggle' were there among them. The assembled laity and clergy were impressed by the evidence they heard. However, their reactions differed. To those present, the stories of the aggression in Garanhuns left a stronger impression than the events in Recife. The direct influence on the local CEBs of the confrontations between the local *basista* Catholicism and the ecclesial hierarchy in the country and the region remained limited. The public symbolic order travels a long route before reaching the people. This is a consequence of the structural positions of the actors and the effects of these positions on the process of mediation. In this respect, the positions of the clergy

⁸ Because I owned a car, I was among those of his friends who became his driver and human shield. The situation often seemed unreal. I was never really afraid, as long as I thought rationally about the situation. However, the emotion of fear seems to have its own dynamics and I became convinced that threats like this contribute to the goals of the offenders, even if they do not carry out the murders.

⁹ José Hélio da Silva was shot to death on 13 December 1990 (Jornal do Commercio 1990).

and the laity are different and therefore their respective reactions to the developments in the public symbolic order are also different. Furthermore, neither the clergy nor the laity are homogeneous categories in their interpretation and mediation of the symbols and rituals of the dominant order.

The clergy are the first to feel the effects of changing institutional policies. For Garanhuns, however, the process of restoration taking place in the global Catholic church had no immediate consequences. Dom Tiago continued to be the liberationist leader of the church in Garanhuns. There was even a strengthening of the liberationist policy to be observed, because several older priests left their parish and were replaced by young priests recently educated at the liberationist, regional seminary.¹⁰ The conflicts in the diocese of Recife and Olinda were followed closely by the clergy of Garanhuns, but for the time being they could continue their work. There grew among the clergy and professional pastoral agents an awareness of their privileged situation, and in their conversations they often spoke with fear about what would happen when Dom Tiago retired.¹¹ However, this remained largely a topic for the small group of pastoral agents closely associated with the leaders of the diocese. Generally they did not share these concerns with the laity, the ordinary churchgoers and CEB members. Also, conflicts like the one on the Morro da Conceição were understood only by a small group of *basistas*, who participated in several protest actions in Recife.

Despite the liberationist policy of the diocese, criticisms directed at parts of the global church as well as conflicts with the powerful in the local society were considered controversial in the context of the local church. Several members of the clergy preferred a more moderate stance and the policy had always been the result of much discussion and compromise. Now that the issue was both the participation of the church in secular politics and the political conflicts within the church, the local liberationist leaders' room to manoeuvre had become even more restricted. Thus, different views on the relation between politics and religion among the functionaries of the local Catholic community came more to the surface. However, the controversies were largely played out behind closed doors. Especially now that the face of the Catholic church presented in the media revealed many quarrels and disagreements between bishops and priests, maintaining the image of the 'unity of the church' was important in the local context.

The laity were far less affected by the developments in the public symbolic order. As the local church continued under liberationist leadership, the process of restoring clerical authority in the Roman Catholic Church largely passed them by. Most of the laity of base communities and other groups who witnessed the wake at the assembly of 1990 remained silent. Other circumstances added to the limited influence that the developments in the global church had at the local level. Many laity had never heard the details of the problems at the Morro da Conceição. Recife is a long way away for most inhabitants of the *agreste*, and their sources of information are limited to local radio stations and sometimes the national television news. The radio stations mostly limit their journalism to local small talk and obituaries of those who have passed away. Access to television is a privilege

10 Dom José Cardoso closed the seminary in Recife, but a new liberationist seminary was established in the nearby archdiocese of João Pessoa.

11 Dom Tiago retired in 1996 and the diocese remained vacant until 1998. I have no data on the recent developments in Garanhuns.

of the urban population, since most rural communities have no electricity.

The threats to the life of Father Marcelo came nearer to their own life experiences, if only because of the violence they witnessed in everyday life. The participants in the wake were shocked. Nevertheless, the concerns for the well-being of the priest remained mostly restricted to his parishioners and the group of *basistas* I mentioned above. I never heard members of the CEBs of São Vicente comment on the case.

What stood out in the discussion of Father Marcelo's case was the fear of violence. This fear was widespread in society as a whole. In relation to the political activism of the faithful, it formed an obstacle. The foundation of a union of rural workers in Caetés, for example, was difficult because people feared reprisals. Especially in the rural area - where the social, economic and political power is in the hands of the landowners - the poor are afraid to raise their voice.

The contributions of the laity to the 'wake for the victims of the struggle of the poor' revolved around this type of issue. They were smaller and perhaps less dramatic than the stories of Father Luís and Father Marcelb, but at the same time more decisive for the outcome of the liberationist campaign. Threats need not involve physical violence. At the time of the conflict over the salaries of the municipal teachers in Caetés, several CEB leaders did not openly support the priest. Although they believed Father Milton was right to criticize the municipal authorities, they had their own reasons to stay out of the mobilization. Olívia from the community of Brejo dos Santos was one of them. Her house had no well and she fetched her water from a property belonging to the mayor, who lived nearby. Furthermore, the mayor was compadre of one of her sisters. She was afraid to support the priest because she might lose access to the water. These kinds of personal relations of dependence and ritual kinship play an important role in local communities, and often interfere with the realization of religious political action.

POLITICS IN THE PUBLIC SYMBOLIC ORDER

The public symbolic order is heterogeneous and displays contradictions and strife. Nevertheless, the main trait continues to be that the church is a powerful institution, represented by religious specialists at all levels. The institution is on the side of the poor, or at least serves as protection against the dangers of society. Further, a great deal of the power of the church springs from its monopoly on sacred resources. This, however, is largely taken for granted, and is not activated or explicated in the public symbolic order. Lastly, the image of repression was transmitted. Liberationist Catholics suffered from the threat of physical violence, from subjection and from the withdrawal of 'favours' by the powerful in the secular world; or, in liberationist rhetoric, the people of God suffered from the evils of society. In part, the danger also came from within the institution itself, in the form of internal disputes and differences of opinion concerning the task of the church. In Garanhuns, this did not directly affect the activities of laity and clergy as it did in other parts of the country.

Yet the political was a topic containing many contradictions. At the external level, both the ecclesial institutional politics and the social and political organization of Brazilian society transmitted images of authority and social inequality that contradicted the central values of the liberationist campaign. The liberationist actors leading the diocese of Garanhuns, however, continued to emphasize ideals of the democratization of church

and society. Nevertheless, among the members of the clergy as well as among the laity of the different groups and associations in the parishes, the interpretations of liberationist Catholicism varied widely. An important factor that evoked these different opinions was the general hostile environment.

Despite the dangers of political actions, a manifestation on 1 May 1990, organized by the recently founded union, attracted hundreds of people. A Mass celebrated by *frei* Jaime in the presence of Father Milton and four Franciscan friars, showed that the liberationist church of Garanhuns was supporting this action. The friars emphasized their presence by wearing a *batina* (cassock) they did not use in everyday life. By doing so, they were appealing to sentiments of the church as a powerful institution in Brazilian society.

At the same time, everyone knew this church could not protect the laity against social or political violence from its opponents, nor overrule the dependence of the poor on the powerful people in local society. Lay leaders were also very aware of this. Alberto summarized the division of positions and roles as follows: "The priest denounces but the lay man denounces and fights. There in Quipapá the priest escaped to France and the president of the union died."¹² For some activists of the local lay groups, the awareness of their vulnerable position is a disappointment that interferes with their determination to enter the political. In the next section, the question is raised how, under these circumstances, the liberationist values regarding the political are mediated at the local level.

7.2 Liberationist ideals in local discourse

Because of its controversial nature and symbolic meaning, 'politics' in the religious is an apt theme with which to find out more about the properties of the connections between cultural politics and ideological change in base communities and other lay groups. In this section, I will focus on the mediation of liberationist political ideals in the local context.

VIEWS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION

The description of the diocesan assembly in Chapter 1 showed that the representatives of several lay groups in the diocese did not agree with the attention given to secular politics by the *basistas* who were present. Roughly three views were represented at the assembly. Some clergy and lay people found that the preferential option for the poor requires political support for leftist parties. This group is essentially similar to the *basista* group that installed itself around the radio in the courtyard of the seminary. They openly campaigned for the PT in and with their groups and wore teeshirts bearing party slogans.

A second view, one held by most priests, was that the role of the church in the political process was to inform the people about politicians and political parties in an objective way, without mentioning the names of the individuals or parties for which one should vote. This was Father Milton's view. He did not use the names of presidential candidates in his sermons. However, he did make statements about political issues of the type made by Father Reginaldo on the Morro da Conceição about workers and bosses. Again and again he called on his parishioners to reflect on their obligations as citizens to their

12 Record 941017-641 : "O padre denuncia, mas o leigo denuncia e luta. Lá em Quipapá o padre fugiu para França e o sindicalista morreu."

community and society as a whole. He urged his listeners to think carefully before they voted. Many found his insistence on the topic tedious. I will return to this below. The margins between this view and the explicit form of the *basista* group are easily blurred in practice. Good listeners do not need to hear the names of certain politicians in order to understand the preference of a priest who says they should vote for the candidate who is a worker, too.

A third view was that it was best to avoid talking about politics. Some older priests in the diocese were known to follow this line. In summary, this view maintains that religion and politics are two separate fields and should not be mixed. However, it is hard to distinguish between the rejection of the relevance of politics overall and the aversion to leftist political groups. In practice, the most visible political involvement of clergy and lay activists was to support the PT and Lula, and this might have added to the overall rejection of 'politics in the religious'.

The above classification of three views of the relation between the religious and politics runs the risk of being too simple and generalized. Many members of the lay groups in Colina, including the base communities, regard religion and politics as two separate fields that should not be mixed. However, this does not mean they are totally opposed to the instructions of the priest. Others have no objections at all to the instructions delivered by Father Milton, or believe it is a task of the clergy to inform the faithful about the subject. The lay members of the groups in the parish have various perceptions of the issue, and the classification can only serve as a rough indication of the spectrum. The mediation of these beliefs and practices shows great complexity. To understand this better, I will first give some examples of the way Father Milton discusses the theme in his sermons, and then treat extensively the mediation of these ideas and the eventual (re)interpretation within different lay groups.

LIBERATIONIST PREACHINGS

The core of the message Father Milton and other liberationist clergy disseminate concerning political activism is that people should accept their responsibilities as citizens. In general, the approach of liberationist teachings is that the laity acquires knowledge and then applies rational reasoning in order to understand their society. Only through a collective endeavour can a better world be created.

With respect to political participation, the reasoning goes as follows. When God created earth, he wanted everybody to be happy. He wanted his kingdom on earth. Thus, we should work to help God to create the kingdom. This kingdom can only be constructed through politics. Jesus was political, too. Politics means to fight for equality, for chances and rights for everyone. The only way to achieve this justice is by organizing. Political parties are one possible form of organization. However, not participating in politics by not voting is a mistake. "We often say 'it is the will of God' (*Deus quis assim*) but poverty and misery are not the will of God. We, the people, want it this way."¹³ This message is transmitted in many forms in the parish.

One day at the celebration of the day of Santa Teresinha, a popular saint in the parish, Father Milton told the following story. He said: "Santa Teresinha loves roses. Who wants

13 Record 900923-144.

to give her a rose?"¹⁴ The whole congregation raised a hand. The priest continued: "Everybody, it seems, but I have not yet told you what a rose is. A rose is: not to vote for a *pelego* (straw leader)." He then explained that it is important to vote for candidates who have an engagement (*compromisso*) with the people. He therefore advised his audience to look at the history of the candidates in order "to see on what side they are." Now that everyone had said they wanted to give a rose to the saint, they had a promise to fulfil.

The priest then warned about the power of the saint. He lowered his voice and started to tell a story he said he had heard from a photographer. "Once a girl wanted to have a photo taken in the church garden. However, her interest in the spot was inspired by the flowers and not by her love for the saint. She told the photographer she did not want the image of the saint to be in the photo." Father Milton said that the photographer did his best to fulfil the girl's wishes, but when he printed the roll of photos he discovered that the only one not to have come out properly was the portrait of the girl. When the girl heard this, she repented and decided to have a new portrait taken, this time standing beside the saint. This photo was very beautiful. In short, Santa Teresinha should not be insulted. The listeners could draw their own conclusions.¹⁵

In his sermons, Father Milton often criticized people who say that a priest should not talk about politics. "Who says that, is ignorant," he said loudly during the feast of Santa Teresinha. On another occasion, he used a comparison to explain his point of view. He compared the task of the priest with that of parents. "If a daughter comes home with a fiancée that the parents do not like, they try to explain to her that it would be best to end the relationship. They do so because they want the best for her. Sometimes a daughter may be so in love that she does not see that the man is not a suitable partner because he does not like to work or treats her badly. It is therefore important for the parents to give her good advice. Well, the priest who explains politics to his parishioners also has good intentions."¹⁶

Father Milton and the other liberationist priests, however, were not the only religious specialists who tried to inform the people about political issues. For example, the priest in the neighbouring parish of Capoeiras also tried to inform them. The political preference of this priest, Father Gerson, was for right-wing parties. He regularly organized a mission of the popular missionary *frei* Damião, who is known for his demagoguery and ability to attract thousands of people to his preachings (p.90). During the 1989 presidential campaign, *frei* Damião appeared in the propaganda film of PRN candidate Fernando Collor. He also administered a mass for Collor to celebrate the victory of the candidate in the first round of the presidential elections (Souto Maior 1997:33). Since then, the old friar has been considered part of the propaganda team of Collor's party.¹⁷ His regular appearances in Capoeiras caused much confusion, as I will show below. Especially the people of Caetés and surrounding *sítios* would visit the missions in Capoeiras, because it is nearby. For now, it suffices to emphasize that in the diocese of Garanhuns the liberationist campaign was not the only campaign carried out. Other opinions and interpretations of politics were

14 Santa Teresinha is associated with roses.

15 Record 900923-145.

16 Record 900930-158.

17 *Frei* Damião died in 1997, at the age of 98.

also put forward by religious actors. These multiple voices caused considerable confusion.

TO FOLLOW OUR SHEPHERD (VOTES OF CONFIDENCE)

The three views discussed above are both rejected and supported by base communities and other lay groups. I found more resistance among Catholics who are not a member of a group than among those who do participate in one. Two reasons may account for this. First, the connection between religion and politics in CEBs may be a criterion for the selection of new members. However, we would then expect that members of other groups would subscribe less to this liberationist interpretation of Catholicism. Therefore, a second reason seems viable, namely that people of all lay groups are engaged with the contemporary and dominant liberationist campaign. They are more exposed to the discourse of Father Milton and more involved in the liberationist campaign, which makes them more used to and receptive to the alliance between the religious and political engagement.

According to the propagators of the liberationist campaign, the leaders of lay groups are the agents who pass the information to their local groups. Of course, leaders of base communities are the primary agents concerned with fulfilling this task. However, the policy of the diocese also includes leaders of other groups in this instruction project, as was shown above. Therefore we should compare the way the ideas on politics are worked out in the different types of lay groups. I will start with two base communities.

João, the leader of the community of Água Limpa, was explicit on the political aspect of his task as a religious leader. "When Jesus was on earth, He defended complete human beings, body and soul."¹⁸ Therefore, praying to end up in heaven is not enough, according to João. He believed the situation of his community and the poor in Brazil overall would become better by voting for the right politicians. He therefore always participated in the meetings organized by the coordination team of the diocese, so as to hear the orientations on politics.

Several other leaders of base communities also attended these meetings. Among the communities in São Vicente parish, two observations stand out. First, the female CEB leaders seem less comfortable with the subject of politics. They rarely attend the diocesan meetings and generally pay less attention to the elections or other political topics at the gatherings of their groups. This finding is consistent with the conclusions of Chapter 6. Second, discussions of politics at election time focus more on questions concerning the integrity of individual candidates and their record of service to the local community or the poor in general, than on party programmes or ideological disputes.¹⁹

To spread their knowledge in their communities, the leaders generally use the documentation furnished by the diocese. João also followed the *roteiro* of the diocese during the meetings he organized in his *sítio*, and 'preached' - as he expressed it - about the political themes suggested in it. The reason he acted this way was simple: the only way the situation of the poor can become better is for them to take the advice of the ministers of God, of the Church.²⁰

18 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 30: "*Porque Jesus quando passou, ele passou defendendo o homem todo, corpo e alma.*"

19 Other researchers also established this. See Gay 1994, Zaluar 1985.

20 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 36: "*Podia mudar a situação, mas se o pessoal, se o pessoal*

The priests always preach, to advise us to seek a government that will help the communities, and the people always turn the other way. That is to say, they do not want to hear the voice of God, or of the ministers of God. Because the clergyman received an education, he studied, he will not Because the priest does not want bad things for anybody, he only wants to see everybody happy, [so] when he gives advice, we have to follow it, if we are Christians, if we are followers of Jesus Christ. Thus, everybody should follow the line of the diocese, of the Church.²¹

However, most people do not follow the advice of the church. On election day, they vote for other candidates. João's explication now takes a rather extremist turn. In his opinion, such people are not the real followers of the church.

That is to say they are false followers, because if I am a follower of the gospel, of Jesus Christ, I am following my shepherd. I have to follow the advice of the bishop who is my shepherd. Of the priest, take his advice. Yet if I go to the other side, he [someone else 'on the other side'] gives me other advice and I go to the other, so I am a false follower. Is this not what is happening? And this way the situation will never become better, because nobody takes the advice of our clergymen who understand the things that we do not understand. Especially we who are the bores here in the *sítio*, we do not have the knowledge of these things and [can] go against the church. Then the suffering goes on for us. I believe that if we do not become true followers and take the advice of our clergy, things will become ever worse.²²

It will be no surprise that João is one of the most active CEB leaders in the parish. He is one of the *mini-padres* I referred to. Ten years ago he started to organize meetings in his *sítio*, Água Limpa, and nowadays he is often invited to preach in other communities, too. Furthermore, his CEB was developing a community project at the time. In the last part of this chapter, I will describe the developments concerning this project. The above statements reveal an intense faith in God and a sincere dedication to the church. This dedication includes assent to the political part of the liberationist campaign. Nevertheless, the political ideas of João seem rather unsophisticated.

Two points are important about the ideas expounded in the citations. The first refers to João's interpretation of liberationist ideals. His political ideas are not based on knowledge of party programmes or on political doctrine. In fact, he states that he understands little of it. Politics is something for those who have studied and know how to deal with it. However, his vote is a solid one. He follows what he calls "the advice of his shepherd" - the instructions of the diocese. His political commitment is thus based on the authority of the clergy, an authority couched in sacred power.

The second point concerns the reception of João's advice by the members of his group. João passed on his ideas of 'following our shepherd' to the members of his CEB.

tomasse o conselho dos ministros de Deus, da igreja."

21 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 37: "Os padres sempre pregam, orientando a gente para procurar um governo que vá ajudar as comunidades e as pessoas sempre viram para o outro lado, quer dizer que não escutam a voz de Deus, dos ministros de Deus, porque o sacerdote recebeu a formação, né, ele tem estudo, ele não vai ... que o padre não deseja mal a ninguém, só deseja vê todo mundo feliz, quando ele dá um conselho, então temos de tomar aquele conselho do sacerdote, se somos cristãos, se somos seguidores de Jesus Cristo, então todo o mundo seguisse a linha da Diocese, da igreja."

22 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 37-8: "Quer dizer que é um falso seguidor, porque se eu sou seguidor do evangelho, de Jesus Cristo, eu tô seguindo - como diz, eu tô seguindo o meu pastor. Tem que seguir a orientação do bispo que é meu pastor. Do sacerdote, tomar os conselhos dele. Mas se eu vou para outro lado, ele me orienta para lado e eu vou para outro, então eu sou um falso seguidor. Não é isso que acontece? E dessa maneira que vai a situação nunca vai melhorar porque quem não toma os conselhos dos nossos ministros que entende as coisas que nós não entende, principalmente a gente que é matuto aqui no sítio, não temos conhecimento de nada das coisas e a gente vai de encontro (contra) com a igreja, então ... o sofrimento continua para a gente. Eu acredito que ... olhe, se a gente não passar a ser um seguidor certo, tomar os conselhos dos nossos ministros, a coisa continua de pior a pior."

He complained that the people do not follow the instructions of the church. This is because people are suspicious of the priest, he said. The gossip is that 'the priest orders to vote for a communist party'.²³ However, nobody discusses this at the meetings of the CEB of Água Limpa. "They stay quiet (...) To my face nobody says anything."²⁴ Thus, there is never a real discussion of political views and issues in the CEB. Nor does João facilitate such discussions. In fact, he has found a simple way to avoid criticism: he always uses the *roteiro* furnished by the diocese to legitimize his actions to the members of his group, "because here we find the truth."²⁵ Again, the sacred authority of the clergy serves as the motivation for his action.

As to the reception of the political message of liberationist Catholicism in local base communities, another point struck me as being important. João tried to avoid real discussion of the topic in order to avoid discord within his group. Above I touched upon the value of unity in the religious. Many CEB members referred to this concept when talking about politics. Luzia even used to vote *nulo* (return a blank form) because she did not want trouble in her community. Another woman said that she always followed her son when voting, to avoid arguments in the family.

João's dedication to the liberationist ideals is grounded in his belief in a better world. He also has a clear vision of the way to achieve this better world. Following the instructions of the clergy will guide the faithful to the political choices that will help construct a society of justice and happiness for all. The notion that political activism is the way to create God's kingdom on earth is thus part of João's beliefs. In this respect, the liberationist ideals formed his social and religious consciousness.

João's ideas and observations are shared by many community leaders and community members. However, his unconditional trust in the clergy is not so common. Let us now turn to the CEB members in Brejo dos Santos to see how they mediated the liberationist view towards political participation.

NOBODY KNOWS

As I mentioned, 1989 and 1990 were *tempo de política* (times of politics) because of the elections. Therefore the topic of political choice appeared in many contexts. In the community of Brejo dos Santos, the upcoming elections caused much insecurity in 1990. One day after the meeting of the CEB, a group of women went to Sônia's house to have coffee. The conversation soon turned to the subject of the elections and the involvement of the clergy in the electoral campaign. Nita started by saying that many people do not like the preachings of priests on the topic. The others then gave their opinion:

Carmo: Not lying but speaking the truth is good. Nobody comprehends politics. Maybe only the people of the church, maybe they comprehend, because they live in it.

Olivia: Sometimes when they do not understand [people say:] 'I am going to vote for the winning party'. I know it will be very difficult to change this scheme.

Luzia: It will, it will. Especially [because] there are different types of priests. There is this Father Gerson who gives a lot of advice to the people. He helps people and so on, and he is of the right.

23 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 38: "O padre mandando votar num partido comunista ... que às vezes eu vejo essas conversas por aí." Here, the earlier campaign of the clergy against communism (see Chapter 4) resonates in the interpretations of the laity.

24 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 39: "Ficam calados. (...) na vista assim, ninguém fala nada não."

25 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 33: "... que ali a gente encontra a verdade."

He does not negotiate with any other party.²⁶

The women agreed that this was all very confusing. First, politics in itself is difficult to understand. Olívia referred to a frequently heard reason for voting for a certain candidate, namely, to show support for the expected winner.²⁷ The considerations expressed by the voters at the time of the presidential election included the unsuitability of Lula, who was a worker 'just like us' and therefore lacked the 'culture' required to fulfill the task of president. This argument had many supporters even in the countryside near Caetés, which is Lula's home ground.

Secondly, even the priests had different opinions. The people could not rely on the priests they knew best - Father Milton and Father Gerson - because they gave conflicting advice.²⁸ Also, they were not totally sure about which party they should vote for if they wanted to follow the advice of Father Milton:

Listen, when the priest comes he says: 'Let us vote for the least bad candidate'. If he would only say: 'Look, John Doe is less bad because of this and this and that' - but he only says 'less bad'. I was thinking that he does not explain well.²⁹

Then Nita added: "We remain in doubt, without knowing."³⁰ The others agreed with her. Luzia continued:

We do not know. Then comes someone else saying: 'Look, so-and-so is better than John Doe'. Then comes another person saying that John Doe is better than so-and-so, and you know, all are bad. That is why there is always a balance, because nobody knows.³¹

All in all, these women agreed that politics was not good. This opinion is widespread among members of lay groups. Good politicians do not exist: it is all *farinha do mesmo saco* (flour from the same sack). People do not believe in politics. They look upon it as a dirty game played by the powerful, in which they - the poor - will always be the losers. The teachings of the liberationist campaign may have enhanced their knowledge of the political process and created a greater awareness of the importance of politics for the social situation of the poor, but this did not create firm self-confidence in the matter in the lives of the faithful united in the base community. Luzia said: "When it comes to voting, I never vote right. When I do not vote right, I vote wrong."³²

Compared with the base communities in the parish, the other lay groups are less

26 Record 901005-160 / sheet 1-2: Carmo: "*Mentir não, agora falar a verdade é bom. Ninguém entende política. Só se for esse pessoal da igreja, pode ser que entenda, vive tudo por dentro.*" Olívia: "*As vezes que não entendem, [as pessoas dizem:] 'vou votar no partido que ganha.' Eu sei que vai ser difícil a gente mudar esse quadro.*" Luzia: "*É, é. Ainda mais [porque] tem tipo de padre diferente um do outro né. Porque tem aquele padre Gerson, que a conselha muito o povo. E que ajeita e não sei o que, e só é da direita. Ele não negócio de outro partido não.*"

27 It might be that this reasoning should be related to clientelism. Voting for the expected winner might secure future advantages, or at least forge smooth relations with someone in a powerful position. See Caldeira (1984:235-246) for a nice discussion on this problem.

28 This was all regularly reported in the regional newspapers; e.g. *Diário de Pernambuco* 1989b, 1989c, 1989d, *Jornal de Commercio* 1989.

29 Record 901005-160 / sheet 18: "*Olhe, porque o padre diz assim. Se o padre vai, diz assim: olhe vamos escolher o menos ruim. Se ele ao menos dissesse: olhe, fulano é menos ruim por isso, isso e isso aquilo - mas só diz "o menos ruim" - Agora vá pensar, que ele não esclarece direito*"

30 Record 901005-160 / sheet 18: "*Fica em dúvida. Fica sem saber.*"

31 Record 901005-160 / sheet 18: "*A gente não sabe. Ai o outro vai e diz: olhe, fulano de tal ele é melhor do que fulano. (...) E sabe que nenhum presta. (...) Ai é por isso que fica essa balança. Porque não tem quem saiba minha gente.*"

32 Record 901005-260 / sheet 5: "*Agora para votar, eu nunca voto certo. Quando eu não voto certo, voto errado.*"

involved in politics. They have different goals, as discussed in Chapter 5. The guidelines they use in their meetings do not include the discussion of political matters as the *roteiros* of the CEBs do. The *Apostolado* and the Legion of Mary have their own schedules and routines. They say their usual prayers and perform their usual rituals. For the rest, they seem indifferent to the topic of politics.

The charismatic prayer groups are an exception in this respect. In the context of the image of their group created by the media - i.e. as being apolitical and a weapon used against liberation theology - the local groups find themselves compelled to explicate their position on the subject. In fact, during their meetings they do discuss the task of the faithful in the political process. This happens in very general terms, referring to the importance of good governance and the obligation of every citizen to vote for the common good. Compared with the emphasis politics receives in the liberationist campaign, the Charismatics do not spend much time on the topic. The means to achieve a better world is through prayer, not politics. However, obedience to religious authority is also an important part of the charismatic ideology. Thus, Rosa, a leader of the prayer group of the parish, stated:

We should not get mixed up in the realm of politics. In this respect, the priest must give us an orientation. We should not participate in politics as the progressive Church does these days. I am on the side of the Pope.³³

In other words, although politics is not the realm of religious action, the faithful have to follow the instructions of the clergy. Rosa is aware of the context of the liberationist Catholicism with which she has to deal. She does not agree with the liberationist emphasis on political action. The eventual difference of opinion may be solved by an appeal to the higher authority of the Pope.

Submission to clerical authority may also have interesting results. As most priests and the bishop of Garanhuns defended the liberationist call for political participation and to vote for candidates who 'are at the side of the people', a group of young members of the Charismatic movement in town sided with the *basistas* during the 1989 and 1990 elections. Several liberationist priests and lay activists had openly solicited votes for PT candidates, and that religious people included 'politics' in their religious work was not surprising, although it was certainly not uncontroversial. The militancy of the young Charismatics was at odds with the reputation of the RCC as not being politically engaged or on the conservative side of the political spectrum (Pierucci and Prandi 1996b). For these youngsters, however, their behaviour was a logical result of their religious practice, which was formed not only by RCC teachings, but also by the local liberationist rituals and ideals. The fusion of these elements brought about their strong, left-wing political militancy.

Compared with the RCC and the CEBs, other lay groups have no policy regarding political activity. Their aims are simply different. Despite this indifference towards politics, the members of other lay groups come into contact with the discussion on politics on several occasions in parish life. Most members of the Apostleship of Prayer and the Legion of Mary tend to be quite open to the political discourse of the priest and lay activists in the parish. The reason for this acceptance can be found in various circumstances.

33 Interview 910405-260 / sheet 11: "A gente não entra muito nesta área de política. Quanto à política o padre deve orientar. A gente não deve entrar tanto na política como a igreja progressista faz ultimamente. Eu estou com o papa."

First, their leaders are invited to the instruction meetings of the diocese, just as the CEB leaders are. Wanting or not wanting the lay leaders of the religious groups in the parish may incorporate the liberationist political ideology in their religious jargon. Those who shared the commitment to the authority of the diocesan religious specialists we saw in the case of João, were even likely to include the instructions delivered at those meetings. Given the importance of clerical authority in charismatic groups, this also applied to them. Clearly, not all leaders of lay associations are receptive to this message. I once heard someone leaving a diocesan meeting concerning politics say: "At the time of the military there was at least order."³⁴

A second manner through which the members of the Apostleship of Prayer and the Legion of Mary came into contact with the political discourse of the liberationist campaign in the diocese is during collective celebrations and rituals in the parish. They go to Mass, just as the CEB members do. They also participate in processions. They attend wakes, marriages and baptism rituals performed by the priest or lay ministers. There they also hear the sermons of Father Milton. As I mentioned, these sermons often produced many mocking faces. Sometimes people even left the church during the sermon. Frequently, people complained about the mixing of politics and religion during Mass (for example, the woman who found the sermons of Father Milton 'mere gossip'; p. 127). For others, however, the reasoning of the priest makes sense and they integrate it into their routines in their religious group. For example, at a meeting of the *Apostolado* a woman prayed during the intercession for the people to choose the candidate of the poor at the upcoming presidential elections. She thus demonstrated that her group is not only a part of the parish in an organizational respect (Chapter 5) but shares its commitment to liberationist Catholicism.

Lastly, this overlapping is, of course, also caused by the fact that many members of lay groups are members of more than one group, as was shown in Chapter 6. CEB members may also be members of the Apostleship or participate in the meetings of the charismatic prayer group. So the third and last occasions on which members of lay groups are exposed to the liberationist ideals of political education, are created by the fact that membership is not limited to one group. People may combine their activities in the Legion of Mary or another group with participation in a base community. They will then introduce the teachings from one group into the other.

Despite widespread commitment to the cause of the Workers Party, as far as the results of national elections was concerned, the endeavour of the liberationist church apparently made no difference. The local result was the same as it was nationally: Lula lost the race, even in his birth place. Many Catholics were not sure whether they should lament this fact or be happy about it. Perhaps there was a reason behind this, too. As Joana of the community of Brejo dos Santos suggested, referring to the almighty power of God: "He up there knows things much better than we do."³⁵ Perhaps Lula's defeat was meant to be.

34 Record 900923-144

35 Record 941905-623 / sheet 4.

MEDIATING POLITICAL DEALS

In Brazil, voting is compulsory for all literates above the age of eighteen. It is optional for illiterates, people older than seventy, and for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds (Constituição 1988: Art. 14). All members of lay groups can therefore use their vote. They may, however, abstain or leave their voting form blank, which some do. For most of the laity, local and national politics are a complicated, awkward affair. Ideological questions and party affiliation remain largely in the background in their daily religious practice.

For most of the clergy in Garanhuns, involvement in politics is a logical consequence of their religious beliefs. In their view, there is no opposition between politics and religion. Both are aspects of one united world-view. This general idea takes various forms and has various contents in the practice of everyday religion. Father Milton is one of the priests who translate it into orientating and advising the people about voting and democratic responsibility.

The analysis of the reception of the political content of the liberationist campaign in the practice of lay groups showed that there are various ways in which the people mediate this message. Only the CEBs and the charismatic prayer group discuss the topic at their meetings, although they do this in different ways. For the CEBs, politics is a way to achieve the desired justice in society. However, the people do not know how to employ this basic idea in their community and this causes much insecurity within the groups. One way to eliminate this insecurity is to simply follow the advice of the clergy. The authority of the priest or bishop then becomes the motive to endorse the unity between the religious and politics. In the charismatic prayer group, the political is treated as a problematic topic, but is resolved by adhering to the instructions of the clergy and higher ecclesial authority. As the example of João showed, this option may also be chosen by CEB participants.

For the laity, the union of politics and religion is thus not as logical as it is for the liberationist clergy. They do not see the religious and politics as the same. In other words, people make a distinction and often label religion as good and politics as bad. The political world is full of strife, quarrels and insincerity. This causes tension in the religious, and is therefore better avoided.

The evidence discussed in this section could lead to the conclusion that the political discourse of the liberationist campaign failed to reach the faithful. Such a conclusion would be precipitate because it overlooks another important aspect of the religious: ritual. In the next section, we will turn to aspects of democracy in the organization of the religious in the parish of São Vicente. This will provide further evidence for the observation that most parishioners do not reject the political explications of the priest. In several lay groups, especially the base communities, part of the liberationist discourse has been smoothly incorporated.

7.3 The power of ritual

The faithful active in the religious mediate the liberationist message in a variety of ways. Because the religious is to a large extent built of symbols, and a property of symbols is their unfixed meaning, this is only logical. Until now we have focussed on the ideological aspects of the mediation of politics in the liberationist campaign. The religious practice

is, however, also created in ritual action. Therefore, this section deals with the rituals of liberationist Catholicism.

RITUALIZATION OF LIBERATIONIST CATHOLICISM

The religious community uses many rituals. Catholicism includes a variety of fixed sequences of actions. In this book, several instances of ritual have already been discussed. According to the Catholic doctrine, the Eucharist is of outstanding value. All other sacraments are also surrounded with ritualized activities. We also discussed the customs regarding prayer, both as an individual act of worship and as a communitarian event. These and other rituals are a continuation of age-old Catholic customs. In the liberationist campaign some of these rituals were modified, while others were relegated to a secondary position. To understand the mediation of the liberationist ideals in the parish, we now turn to the way it was given form in religious rituals.

Ritual is an important means in the liberationist campaign. It is, so to say, a 'vehicle for the message'. Although Mass is undoubtedly the clearest example of a ritual that follows age-old rules, it is also imbued with many elements taken from contemporary liberationist doctrine. We have already seen how the priest uses his sermons to instruct the faithful on the topic of politics. These days, women often read the scripture during Mass. Occasionally, lay people are invited to say something about their community during Mass. New songs have been introduced, sometimes with overt political meanings. Combined, these small changes have created a new content for the Mass. At the same time, many elements remain unchanged. The consecration of bread and wine continues to be the principal element of Mass and still follows the same age-old rules (cf. Nagle 1997:125-30).

Notwithstanding the old roots and unchanged nature of many rituals in Catholicism, new elements have been introduced. The liberationist campaign altered several rituals, often maintaining the old forms and occasions, but introducing new aspects into the traditional repetitious rites. The *via sacra* described in Chapter 3 showed this fusion of elements: while the suffering of Christ is remembered and ritualized in the age-old *via Crucis*, some new elements have been added by the liberationist campaign. The subject of the meditations is no longer only His suffering, but also that of poor people in Brazil. The ritual is not performed in the church but in the neighbourhood, thus symbolically connecting the lives of ordinary people to the sacred. The age-old form has been filled with a new content, as it were. Other examples include the *pedilavum* (John 13:1-20) with female and male apostles washing each other's feet, and the offering of the fruits of the soil during celebrations. A protest march on 1 May took the form of a procession. The banners bore a political message, but the songs sung were the usual liberationist Catholic ones. These examples indicate that the structure of the ritual is the constant factor. The contents of the message may change. Yet, as long as the structure is recognizable the ritual induces certain feelings, and appeals to the people.

Another way of giving a ritual form to liberationist ideals is the reappraisal of previously condemned religious rituals, such as the veneration of saints. In a novena preceding the annual festival of the parish in Colina, every day a lecture was given on the life of a particular female saint. The series included the Virgin Mary, Santa Luzia and Santa Teresinha, and also Santa Quitéria. While Father Milton does not encourage pilgrimage to Freixeiras,

he gave in to the wishes of the parish council because he agrees that Santa Quitéria continues to be an important figure in the local religious order. Also at the request of the laity, a monthly procession (at six on Friday mornings) to the top of the hill was introduced.

The reintroduction of such 'old' rituals was an element of the liberationist campaign, under the name of the "appraisal of the religiosity of the people" (Macedo 1986:159-60, Mariz 1993). This value given to the customs of the people sometimes leads to the combining of religious meetings with popular festivities. I once witnessed a *reisado* performance in the church of Paranatama, right after a celebration honouring the patron saint of the village. A *reisado* is a dance and music performance celebrating the birth of Jesus, usually held between December 24 and January 6 (Rocha 1984, Soares, Ishigami and Moreira 1996). The connection with the religious service in Paranatama was simply the festive occasion because it was already March.³⁶

The power of rituals lies not only in their open character, which makes them easy to adapt to new needs or circumstances, but also in the occasions on which they are performed. Often these are situations of heightened emotional sensitivity (Ortner 1991:75), such as events related to the life cycle of individuals. The emotional climate is a potent element in the shaping of beliefs and perceptions. Rituals also trigger emotions and create receptive frames of mind, as Kertzer (1988:99) put it. These characteristics make ritual an activity that encourages specific interpretations of the world, such as that of the liberationists. The missions carried out by the Redemptorist friars in Colina in 1989 triggered much emotional response. As I mentioned (Chapter 6), they inspired the establishment of many new base communities. Although several of these groups did not last very long, the fact that people wanted to become active in the religious indicates the power of the ritual of popular missions.

RITUALS OF UNITY

Liberationist rituals involve variations on Catholic traditional ritual. Through these rituals the faithful experience the religious, their connection with the religious community and the sacred. These experiences may be more important than the rational or cognitive contents of the religious. Several anthropologists have indicated the power of ritual in the creation of community and cohesion. Thus Kertzer (1988:68) emphasizes that ritual is 'political' because it creates solidarity, and not because it deals with shared understandings of the world, consciousness or ideology. Ritual is a powerful means with which to fuse many meanings into one practice. However, I think that ritual entails more than just unreflective reproduction.

Rituals and symbols also provide space for improvisation and adaptation. Partly, ritual is the unreflective reproduction of custom and pre-established rules and models; however, they simultaneously provide a means with which to work out strategies and interests, and also meanings and beliefs. This double nature offers 'room to manoeuvre' while at the same time providing an anchor in that which is already known and lived.

³⁶ The passion play at the top of the highest hill in Garanhuns (p.55) can also be seen as an example of the use of religious tradition to reach the people. The youngsters that organized the event had no alliance with the clergy or the diocese or parish in general. Their motivation was political education. The means they found to spread their message appealed to the religious feelings of the people and they made use of the emotions triggered by the religious ritual and occasion.

The experiences of several members of the Charismatic prayer group offer an illustration of the double nature of ritual. At first, most Catholics in Colina found the RCC's manner of worshipping somewhat strange. The fact that the meetings were held in the parish church convinced them that this was not a Pentecostal church but a Catholic one, and thus broke down barriers. However, this did not dispel their initial feelings; that happened only after would-be members had attended a few meetings and had discovered many familiar elements in the rituals of the group. This convinced them of the righteousness and Catholicity of it. In other words, the continuity of the rituals - as compared to the other services in the church and the Catholicism already known by the people - offered a sense of coherence that facilitated the expansion of the charismatic version of Catholicism. Thus, the religious order depends more on ritual activity than on shared beliefs (cf. Taylor 1995:31).

This example shows that ritual is more than simply the unreflective repetition of practices. In the parish of São Vicente, I found that especially the value of unity (already singled out in the previous chapter as an important meaning of religious activities) is played out and formed by ritual. People often referred to their identity as Catholics. There is a shared memory of a Catholic past, events, and communitarian and personal occasions, all of which add to this identity. In the religious practice that builds on these elements, the laity play down the differences between the ideals of various forms of contemporary Catholicism.

Even where the interpretation of central elements of the ideology is concerned, the laity play down differences at the local level. By way of an example, it is interesting to look at one central idea of Liberationist Theology: the concept of 'liberation'. In 'liberation', the Holy Spirit is linked to the community, since it is the community of the people of God who strive for liberation. In base communities, 'liberation' applies to the people of God and has the connotation of liberation from injustice. According to the teachings of the RCC, the reference to liberation is a personal, individual liberation from suffering from sin, and from the demonic (Benedetti 1988, Prandi and Souza 1996). Nevertheless, the word has become part of religious jargon, and in daily usage the various meanings have merged. The political connotations of the interpretation of 'liberation', one of the liberationist ideals, has lost its explicit meaning in the search for commonality.

The unity and uniformity created are, however, not the logical and inevitable outcome of the 'workings of ritual', as Kertzer seems to suggest. This is not the whole story. "Practice theory bids us to go a step beyond this position to ask the question of what actors want (Ortner 1989a:197) when they engage in a ritual or espouse an ideology" (Reeves 1995:307). In the previous chapter, we saw the emphasis on unity in the discourse of the laity. In the religious experience, this is a central value and the faithful want to achieve this through ritual, too. Therefore, I believe that the consensus reached in the ritual practice of local Catholicism is not just a result of the nature of ritual, but is also the outcome of the process of meaning-making by the lay actors in the religious. For most members of any lay group, the political message of the liberationist campaign is less important than other aspects of their religious practice, such as the continuity of their Catholic identity and unity with their co-religionists.

A last important point here is that ritual offers a means with which to transcend quarrels and disputes. This happens in various ways. The pilgrims on the Morro da Conceição

simply ignore the conflict between the bishop and the priest: "They come for the virgin" (Nagle 1997:90). In the base community of *sítio* Brejo dos Santos the differences of opinion between the two leaders, Olívia and Juneide, are canalized in the rituals of the CEB meeting. When the discussion becomes too hot, one of them invites the community to sing a song together. Father Milton's policy of talking about the political plight of the faithful without explicitly naming the politicians for whom they should vote may also be an example. Everybody has to vote, and this is a ritualized action, too.

DISCORD AND CONSENT

Politics in the religious creates both discord and agreement. Consent is constructed in the ritual practices of the parish and the lay groups. Some of today's ritual practices are age-old Catholic traditions, while others were created in the course of the liberationist campaign. As far as the political content of liberationist Catholicism is concerned, these ritual practices are an important means in the mediation process. The content of many religious symbols is not fixed. Instead, the meaning of rituals and symbols becomes adapted in the process of constructing the religious community. In this process, CEBs and Charismatic prayer groups, as well as other lay groups, may come to resemble one another, in both ideological meanings and social practices.

7.4 Politics in the daily practice of lay groups

In the previous sections, we saw that the daily practice of the religious in lay groups as well as in the parish as a whole is more important than the different ideologies prevalent in the public symbolic order. The question is, what are the consequences of this observation for the practice of politics and power?

RITUALS OF PARTICIPATION

Apart from being a call to participate in secular politics, the liberationist ideals also entail democratization of the ecclesial organization. I have already mentioned several aspects of this democratization process, ranging from the participation of lay people in the diocesan assembly and the decentralization of pastoral work, to membership of parish councils. In Chapter 5, I described the many roles lay people have in the sacramental practice of the parish. We also saw that the parish has a council in which the laity are represented. Furthermore, base communities and the Apostleship of Prayer each fulfil specific tasks in the day-to-day organization of the religious at the level of the parish. This creates an atmosphere of involvement and participation in the parish.

The liberationist organization of the religious is visible in the local institution, at the level of both the diocese and the parish. The clergy and other professional pastoral agents always point to the many democratically formed platforms where laity and clergy decide together on all kinds of subjects, including the pastoral policy. At the level of the local groups, the rituals of democracy are now an inherent part of the meetings. Although many ambiguities exist in the local organization, the way of meeting in groups, discussing topics suggested in the *roteiro*, choosing leaders and doing things without the presence of the priest have unquestionably become the standard of religious organization.

Probably the most important aspect of this liberationist organization of the religious

is that it entails an emphasis on horizontal rather than vertical relations of power and authority. The promotion of equality represents the promotion of forms of social relations and selfhood that are to a high degree at odds with the existing social relations in the local social and political context. Poor people are not used to raising their voices or engaging in political actions. Especially for women, the contrast with their role and position in family and society is large. Although this creates many difficulties for women (Chapter 6), it also offers opportunities for change and personal development.

The structural features of the liberationist campaign given form in the 'to see, to judge and to act' method were assimilated into the local religious experience and became a guiding motive in the local religious order. The laity - especially those in base communities, but also those in other groups, such as the Apostleship of Prayer or the Legion of Mary - use these liberationist structures in their groups. This organizational structure is important not only for local Catholicism, but also for the general development of democratic citizenship (cf. Banck 1997). The people become familiar with new social forms that may also channel their understandings of the world.

The liberationist democratization of the organization of the religious affects not only base communities but also other lay groups. Thus, the routine in all lay groups exhibits several traits of the liberationist way of doing things. Plenary discussions of Bible texts are now an established custom in all lay meetings. All groups - and not only the base communities - have a representative on the parish council. Parish meetings in preparation for Christmas celebrations or other festivities involve members of all groups. Liberationist features also show in the engagement with the poor in society and the emphasis on the joint responsibility for the religious through evangelization.

In sum, the ritual practice of democracy introduced into the local Catholic church during the liberationist campaign became the norm for religious gatherings. With respect to the subject of politics in the religious, the ritual practice of local Catholicism has incorporated the connection between faith and everyday life. It has put discussions on political topics on the agenda of various lay groups. In the practice of the groups, the laity reproduce democratic values through the application of the liberationist way of reasoning in the structure of the meetings. However, this liberationist conception of politics in the religious also has its limitations.

TO OPEN THE CHURCH

The most important characteristic of ritual is probably its unfixed meaning. Typically, rituals use symbols, which their users can imbue with meaning. To one participant, the *via sacra* may be a representation of the last hours of Jesus, who paid for the sins of humanity; to another participant, however, it may be a protest march against the local government that has failed to construct an adequate sewer system for the neighbourhood. Both may gain strength from the common action, and both may experience it as a religious activity. The open character of the ritual and symbolic practice of the liberationist campaign makes it possible to unite many people under the banner of Catholicism.

Given the significant degree of religious self-management included in the realization of the liberationist ideals, the possibility to develop or to maintain one's own interpretations of the symbols and rituals may become even greater. This allows room for a personal

or local elaboration of liberationist teachings. Thus not only structural factors, such as gender or economic position, explain the diversities between the different CEBs. The participatory conditions shaped in the liberationist campaign form an additional reason for the different interpretations of Catholicism within the CEBs. In some base communities, the women skip the parts of the *roteiro* that refer to politics. In other groups, a key symbol - like liberation - acquires a personal rather than a communitarian meaning. Since there is little clerical control over the groups, the laity have substantial liberty to develop their particular expressions of Catholicism.

The multivocality of rituals and symbols also creates a degree of uncertainty in the organization of the religious. The laity have become co-responsible for parish life, but how far their power extends and whether their initiatives will succeed is not always clear. Many *basistas* cherish the expression 'the people are the church', but not all interpretations by the faithful are equally welcome. The priest supported the idea that women should also be apostles in the celebration of the *pedilavum*, in order to express the equality of men and women before God. Not all ritual actions of the laity receive this approval. When Marisa decided to open the church for the *velório* (wake) of a murdered school teacher, she was not sure whether Father Milton would appreciate her initiative. A *velório* is normally held in the house of the deceased or a member of his or her family. To open the church was a break with this tradition. However, the man had been a public figure and his brutal murder shocked the whole neighbourhood. The *velório* would attract many people and therefore the church would be a fitting place to hold it. Marisa could not ask Father Milton's permission because he was in Recife. The family of the deceased urged her to perform the favour and she decided to "open the church", as she put it. She felt responsible to the degree that she kept an all-night vigil by the body. Despite her good intentions, Father Milton disapproved of this action and the quarrel they had made Marisa stop participating in the parish for more than a year. The priest, in turn, had shown he was still the ultimate authority in the parish, despite his ideas on the self-management of the laity.

The uncertainty with respect to the political message described above is another sign of the open meaning symbols and rituals have in the liberationist teachings. Nevertheless, the ritual form the political ideals gained in the meetings of the CEBs and parish activities facilitate the diffusion and tolerance of this aspect of liberationist Catholicism.

In all, the multivocality of the ritual practice of the liberationist campaign combined with the considerable autonomy inherent in the organization of the religious, causes the laity to reinterpret the political teachings in many an intended or unintended way. One unintended consequence is that in the process of mediation, the call for social action is translated into the act of charity. The rituals that give expression to the need for popular action - such as the composition of the CEB meetings with the critical reflection on the significance of Jesus' message for contemporary society - may lead to conclusions other than the ones foreseen. In many base communities, the focus on the struggle of the poor incites compassion and the provision of charity to the poor.

Another unforeseen consequence of the multivocality of liberationist ritual was that it created opportunities for other lay groups to integrate the political teachings of the liberationist campaign into their own practice. For example, both the CEBs and the RCC have the reading and interpretation of the Scripture as an important element in their practice.

The use of the Bible in the meetings of the laity was strongly stimulated in the liberationist campaign and the charismatic groups follow the liberationist routines in this respect. Furthermore, as the CEB rituals became the standard, they influenced the contents of charismatic prayer meetings. Take, for example, the liberationist custom of 'connecting the Word of God to daily life'. This happens not only at the meetings of base communities, but also during the prayer meetings of the RCC. Although the form may be different - in the CEB's case, it is initiated by a collectivist, liberationist reflection on a Bible text from the *roteiro*, and in the Charismatic case, it is initiated through a personal testimony of a fellow member of the group - the result may be very much the same.

Ritual is important for the reproduction of the liberationist organizational structures. Because of the nature of ritual, however, the meanings of these structures in the religious practice of the laity may vary considerably from the ideals upon which the organization was founded.

NOW THEY WANT TO THROW OUT THE PRIESTS

Within the organization of the religious, the position of the clergy is a special one. Due to his education, contacts and access to sacred powers, the priest is different from all other parishioners. In the liberationist campaign the role of the priest changed, but part of his special characteristics remained intact. The process of decentralizing the sacramental and organizational tasks in the parish meant that lay people took on all kinds of tasks. This was one of the goals of the liberationist campaign, but it also brought some (unintended) ambiguities with it. It created uncertainty for both laity and clergy. In other words, the role of the priest was not clearly regulated and this created indeterminacy.

As for the laity, the priest came more to the side of the people, instead of standing above the community. The priests:

offered the people the possibility to have a say, to have a say in the church. It looked as if the priests ... gave space, in order for the lay person to come into the church.³⁷

In many conversion stories, people emphasize that this meant a new relation with the clergy, a fact that was an important element for their burgeoning activism in the religious. João, for example, stated that he had learned to no longer feel 'shame' in the presence of the priest. Others also emphasized how the priest had become accessible, nearer to their life world, 'ordinary'. This experience was not limited to CEB members. Participants in the charismatic prayer group also reported it. Rosa, for instance, said she was no longer ashamed to be in church. In general, the people who take part in religious activities mentioned the important changes that have occurred since the 1960s, when priests started to teach them to read the Bible and stimulated discussion of its contents. After the Second Vatican Council, the priests descended from the pulpit and started to share their knowledge with the people.

For the clergy, this process created an identity problem. Priests sometimes find it difficult to redefine their own position. If the laity becomes self-sufficient in religious matters, what will be the task of the priest? At the 1989 diocesan assembly, the issue arose during

37 Interview 901112-175 / sheet 48: "*Foi que deram aquela oportunidade para o pessoal também terem voz, também terem voz dentro da igreja. Aí parece que o padre foi se colocando já ... é dando lugar, já quase para o leigo ficar lá dentro da igreja.*"

a plenary discussion and provoked dramatic reactions. The assembly was discussing ways of discovering the causes of difficulties that hinder base communities from developing further and functioning smoothly. The laity said that sometimes the priests may prevent the CEBs from becoming independent groups. They described their ideal priest as a man who would stand in the middle of the community but without behaving as the "owner of the community."³⁸ Some priests reacted furiously. One said: "Now they want to throw the priests out!"³⁹ Another left the meeting, saying "I am leaving, because now they do not need the priest anymore, everything is 'community'."⁴⁰ This row created much confusion among those present. The comments revealed people's fear of destroying the unity of the local church. Many priests were also angry at their 'offended' colleague. The laity felt misunderstood. They did not want to do without priests; on the contrary, they wanted to further develop their relationship in order to promote the common goal of creating base communities. This conflict revealed a small part of the complex relation between laity and clergy in daily parish affairs. The equality preached is an ideal that will never materialize. Various reasons can be given for this prospect.

First, the laity continue to be dependent on the clergy in many aspects. The priest remains the only individual with full access to the sacred. In the division of tasks in the parish, the priests have the monopoly on the sacraments. Although laity may administer the host, the priest is the only person who can consecrate it. He is also the one who can withhold sacraments from individuals. This, of course, is a considerable source of power for him.

The laity are also dependent in other ways. Many activists feel insecure with respect to the content of liberationist ideals and seek help and approval from their priest. This was shown in Chapter 6 with respect to the organization of religious celebrations in the urban area of the parish. Regarding the political part of the message, the description given of the interpretations by João and the women of Brejo dos Santos revealed the image of dependency on priests.

Second, in practical matters, the tasks are not clearly divided. In the day-to-day application of liberationist ideals, theory and practice are sometimes difficult to combine. The parish priest wants the lay activists to take over all kinds of tasks but does not like it when they assume new responsibilities without his approval, as the example of the *velório* showed. Here, the normally implicit authority of the priest became explicit (cf. Comblin 1990:340).

In the parish of São Vicente, a special source of discord was money and the fact that the priest withheld certain matters from the members of the parish council. Father Milton preferred to deal with financial matters on his own, and not even the parish council was kept informed about the budgetary situation of the parish or the priest's household. This created distrust among several persons involved in the organization of the religious in Colina. A rumour went around that Father Milton, the son of a poor family, had used money from foreign organizations destined for the parish to buy a house for his parents

38 Interview 910326-258 / sheet 7vo: "*que não fosse o dono.*"

39 Interview 910326-258 / sheet 7vo: "*Agora querem acabar com os padres.*"

40 Interview 910326-258 / sheet 7vo: "*Eu vou me embora, que agora não precisa mais de padre, tudo é com unidade.*"

in a more affluent neighbourhood of Garanhuns. "He paid in dollars: where else could he have got the money from?" one community leader said. In the view of most people, priests are only human and thus may be tempted to abuse their position, like politicians do, for example.

Third, this kind of distrust also exists to a certain degree among the laity. This distrust and reservation are based on different interpretations of the roles of a community leader. For example, Marisa did not like a certain CEB leader in Colina because this other woman always skipped the discussion part of the meetings. Marisa therefore wondered why this woman wanted to be a part of the group of active parish members, since she was apparently unable to fulfil her task or lacked the conviction that Catholicism should follow liberationist ideals. Their relations with the priest partly caused a division among the most active laity. The priest chooses his own team - or 'court' (Comblin 1990:344) - and this may arouse jealousy and rivalry among the laity.

In sum, with respect to power and authority, the liberationist campaign created an ambiguous situation. The laity are in a position that falls somewhere between dependence and independence. Depending on the situation, including the mood of the priest, they may act or may have to act on their own. As Comblin (1990:339) stated, 'a new way to be Church' is a much used expression. What is not clear, however, is what the 'a' and the 'new' mean. This lack of clarity is felt by all involved in the creation of this 'Church'. The democratization of the religious promoted during the liberationist campaign materialized in the ritual practice and the institutional organization, thus creating a new religious practice. The changes were ambiguous, however. Simultaneously, this realization of the liberationist ideals created indeterminacy and insecurity about matters of competence and responsibility. The authority of the priest became more strictly linked to his monopoly on the sacraments. However, in everyday practice his power stretches well beyond this limit because he is still a member of the institutional church, which is organized top-down. This affects the development and effectiveness of the autonomy of the laity.

THE RITUALS OF THE POLITICAL

In this and the previous section it was shown that rituals are important vehicles for ideals. The political ideals of liberationist Catholicism are for a large part mediated through ritual practices. This occurs on two levels. The previous section focussed on the representation of liberationist political ideals. We found that the use of symbols and rituals made liberationist teachings on political matters more acceptable. The new, political elements in the customary cyclical rituals became the norm for Catholic rituals. In this section, I showed how the rituals of organization in the parish and in the lay groups (such as discussions) are widely used. Both these ritual forms constitute practice that is political in the understanding of practice theory. The question that now needs to be answered is to what extent these ritual practices and the liberationist campaign overall alter the consciousness of the laity. The evidence presented here suggests that the efficacy of ritual in the process of religious change should also be evaluated at the two different levels.

The attitude of liberationist Catholicism towards society is represented at the level of the customary cyclical rituals, such as Mass and the *via sacra*. Here the relation between the religious and its social context is ritualized. Most lay people are spectators at this level,

although a limited number of them may take part in the conception and enactment of the rituals. The openness of many rituals makes it possible for participants to maintain their own meanings and understandings, however.

The politics of the second level - the rituals of the day-to-day organization of the religious groups - might be more enduring and cause profound changes. For the laity, Catholicism is mostly practice. The religious is more about doing and experiencing than about 'believing'. In the rituals of the day-to-day organization of the religious, the laity translate the ideas into activities. Here, the lay people are the enacting actors. Nevertheless, this does not mean the consciousness of all faithful is altered in the way the liberationist campaign intended. I will address this aspect in the next section.

7.5 *Conscientização*

We have seen that the actors involved with liberationist Catholicism understand politics in various ways. In the parish of São Vicente, the ideals of political participation were expressed in clerical discourse, in the rhetoric of several lay leaders, in ritual and sacramental practice, and in the rituals of organization. The liberationist discourse attempted to express and spread ideas of individual responsibility for the creation of freedom and social progress. In the end, the goal of the liberationist campaign was to change the minds of the faithful. The endeavour was literally consciousness-raising.

In Chapter 2 (p. 33) I followed the proposal of Ortner (1989b) in making an analytical distinction between ideology and consciousness. The process of mediating at which a large part of the above analysis was directed makes the connection between the two. We have now come to the point where the actors' 'consciousness' itself must be assessed. The expression 'consciousness-raising' (*conscientização* in Portuguese) is mostly taken as a clear-cut concept. The actual meaning of it has received little discussion in the scholarly literature on liberationist Catholicism. Mostly it was implicitly measured by voting behaviour and engagement in unions or social movements. In anthropological theory, however, consciousness received a lot of attention.⁴¹ Although it is not my intention to discuss the contributions of anthropology here, it is necessary to go into the understanding of the notion of consciousness in order to assess the consequences of the ultimate goal of the liberationist campaign.

For Ortner, consciousness refers to the subjectivity of the actor, the structures of feeling and assumptions people "bring to their social life" (Ortner 1989b:200). As I mentioned, consciousness thus entails many unconscious values. The point in liberationist Catholicism is that not only must the consciousness be changed, but the laity must translate it into critical agency, becoming conscious as it were. The assumption of liberationist Catholicism seems to be that this is a logical, natural process. From an anthropological point of view, this is not so. To understand the connection between structure and agency, Hastrup (1995) makes a distinction between awareness and consciousness that is useful for the analysis of the goal of *conscientização* of the liberationist campaign. Awareness is explicit understanding, and belongs to historical time. Consciousness refers to implicit

41 The subdisciplines psychological anthropology and cognitive anthropology are especially productive in this field. See e.g. the work of D'Andrade 1995, D'Andrade and Strauss 1992, Hastrup 1995.

knowing and lies in the realm of "a timeless dimension of knowing the world and the self" (Hastrup 1995:101). This distinction may help clarify the motivations people construct in their religious activities.

The practice approach pursued in the analysis of the religious in the parish of São Vicente in the previous chapters suggested some ways in which to grasp the results of the conscientization endeavour of liberationist Catholicism. First, the understanding of politics included issues beyond party politics alone. Second, the laity have to operate in a context full of constraints, such as violence, lack of power, and uncertainty and indeterminacy. Third, it drew attention to the relative autonomy of the wishes and plans of the lay actors in the process of religious meaning-making. Departing from these findings, we can try to give concrete contents to the abstract notion of 'raising consciousness'.

Using the analytical concepts of awareness and consciousness, I will go deeper into the meaning and understanding of the ambiguous notion of *conscientização*, and analyse the motivations and actions of the laity. I will start with a short report on the action carried out by the community of Água Limpa in order to obtain piped water. This account will serve as point of departure for a discussion of political action by various lay groups in the parish. In all cases, I will relate the question of awareness and consciousness to the way the laity constructed their actions.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

In 1990 the people of *sítio* Água Limpa started a movement to construct a system that would supply them with drinking water from a mineral well located some distance away. The community had been meeting for more than ten years and until then had never had the courage to undertake any social action. The inspiration now was not exactly as described in the liberationist teachings. In fact, a politician from a nearby town provided the impetus. He had visited the community during his election campaign to become a state deputy, and had promised to arrange electricity for the people if he were elected.

The offer impressed the people, but after discussing the proposal they decided they would rather have water piped to their houses, instead of electricity, because, as they put it, "water is life" (*água é vida*) and of greater importance. For the politician this was no problem and he promised to arrange it. Of course, after the elections and the defeat of the candidate, his promises came to nothing. This, however, did not upset the people. Their comments on the event show that they have a great knowledge of political processes. Just as the politician had tried to use them to achieve his goal, they had gambled on the chance that they, too, would benefit from it. João and the other members of the community were self-conscious about their position in political machinations. Everybody plays his game and they had just done their part to defend their own interests. Had the politician won, then perhaps a dream would have materialized. Unfortunately, they had backed the wrong horse. Months later, João commented on the disappearance of the politician: "The daring fellow lost, he did not come back and will not come back,"⁴² and this did not surprise him very much.

This is reminiscent of the words of Scheper-Hughes (1992:507-8), who so eloquently

42 Interview 901112-175: "O bicho pe rdeu, ele não voltou e não volta não."

portrayed the people of a poor neighbourhood in the *zona da mata*.

The people of the Alto, like rural poor of the Northeast more generally, understand human nature to be flawed and inclined toward treachery. They expect their popular leaders to turn against them if the rewards for doing so are great enough, and they are not self-righteously indignant or outraged on discovering self-serving political deception. Such events only confirm their worst suspicions and reinforce a well-grounded pessimism. Far from rebels or revolutionaries, the rural workers of the Northeast are by social temperament patient, long-suffering, and non-violent people. They generally keep their peace despite the everyday violence of drought, hunger, sickness, and unnecessary death. And they are gentle in the face of the aggression of local bosses and big men, with their hired thugs and gunmen.

The reason João had believed the man could serve community interests was that he had 'helped' other communities in the past. His political or ethical background seemed unimportant. People primarily base their relation with politicians on his or her access to resources. The politicians' personal history and record of established works may help in this, but CEBs do not have structural access to such data and in this case it is the fame of a politician, based on real and imagined facts, that plays a role. In the whole process, the political party to which the politician in question belonged was never mentioned.

The idea of having a water supply near their houses was attractive to the people, and they did not want to give up hope. At the next CEB meeting, they decided to try it anyway. How they should do this, however, was a subject of great uncertainty. João called in the help of his friend Alberto, the *evangelizador* from Colina. Alberto had relatives in the vicinity of Paranatama, where several communities had already successfully campaigned for water (pp. 76, 92) and would have access to useful information. Material resources would, however, create new dependencies.

Some months later, another politician entered the scene and the CEB members also judged this man in regard to his potential ability to furnish construction materials. The new politician was a member of the town council of Garanhuns, the municipality to which *sítio Água Limpa* belongs. The man had started his career in the residents' council of Colina, and this fact alone was enough for people to trust him. By then, six months had passed since the plan had been born and the works were not going very fast. After cleaning the well and digging a basin, the people needed bricks to build the cistern. The town councillor had promised to pay for the bricks, but the brick maker refused to hand them over until he had been paid. A month later, the politician had still not paid for them and the people of *Água Limpa* had to stop work.

The people of *Água Limpa* criticized this politician more than they had the first one. After all, he was someone they knew, he was more like 'one of them' and therefore had an obligation to help the base community members achieve their goal. The comments centred on the fact that he had stepped over to the side of the powerful and betrayed his people, his voters and his roots. Again, they took it as a personal relationship between the community of *Água Limpa* and the politician, and again the political party to which the man belonged was irrelevant. What was considered relevant, however, was that this local politician had used the community's project for his own political ends. He spoke on a local radio programme as though he had initiated the venture. When he did not deliver the building materials, João felt betrayed. After all, it was the CEB that was doing all the work. In this respect, he was both conscientized and stubborn in his convictions.

There are many other examples of this ambiguous behaviour by members of base

communities. Since ideological principles play a minor role in local political machinations, people may take decisions that contradict the political plans of local *basistas*. A case in point is that of Paulo, the CEB leader and *mini-padre* from Colina. For many years, Paulo had been renting a garage in Colina. In it, he and one of his sons made money cleaning and repairing car interiors. The owner of the garage neglected the maintenance of the building, and ignored several requests Paulo made to have the rotten doors replaced. Paulo could not afford to do it himself, since he made only a bare living from his work. During the run-up to the 1990 elections for governor, senator and federal and state deputies, he decided to try getting the repairs done in another way.

Paulo went to talk to the mayor, who supported the right-wing campaign of Joaquim Francisco for the governorship of Pernambuco, and they made a deal: the mayor would take care of the new doors in return for Paulo hanging Joaquim Francisco banners from the garage. The garage was strategically located on the main road through the neighbourhood, and right next to the community centre, from which hung the banners of the other main candidate, 'the candidate of the people of the church', Jarbas Vasconcelos. The deal went through, but Paulo made enemies among some parish *basistas*, including Father Milton. Paulo regretted this but was convinced he had done the right thing. In his opinion, the mayor was a righteous person who knew that Paulo did a lot for the community and wanted to do something in return. Furthermore, the church offers nothing material to its most fervent workers, of which he was one. After all, he could not live for the church alone, he was also responsible for the well-being of his family. Calling this a failure of the conscientization endeavour of the liberationist campaign would be a misunderstanding of the workings of the political process and a disregard of the reasoning of the people.

With respect to the water in Água Limpa, the CEB succeeded in fulfilling the dream. In the end it was an agency of the state of Pernambuco that took over the project and provided the building materials and technical support. In 1994, almost four years after the base community started to make plans, the water was available near their houses. However, yet again the active role of the people was ignored and their success was appropriated by politicians. On the highway, a huge billboard painted in the colours of the Pernambucan flag read:

Water main, *sítio* Água Limpa, Garanhuns
Office of Agriculture, EMATER, Department of Hydric Resources, Government of Pernambuco

When I asked João what he thought of this billboard, he just smiled.

In the urban part of the parish of São Vicente, none of the base communities or any of the other groups ever succeeded in a communal undertaking such as the water project in Água Limpa. The members of rural communities share many more characteristics and interests than the members of urban communities. This facilitated the formulation of common goals for communitarian action.

What came nearest to the water project was the action for a market on Sunday morning in Colina. In order to persuade the municipal government to approve the project and provide the stands, the priest and several CEB members joined forces with the presidency of the Social Centre. The coordination of the endeavour was in the hands of some people at the Social Centre, however, and the priest and the members of the base communities became involved more as private persons than as CEBs. Although, of course, the priest

in particular spoke 'on behalf of' the faithful.

In sum, the example of the water project in Água Limpa shows how difficult it is for people to organize themselves and to undertake action. They have so few means that they become dependent on those who have money or do have access to means. The actions these people develop are political. They are also pragmatic. I would not call this a lack of consciousness. On the contrary, these individuals are very aware of the political system and their place within it. The ideals expressed in the liberationist campaign provoke the laity to take action. However, it does not change the political order and therefore they have to adjust their ideals to the existing structures.

LOCAL UNITY

The political support given to the people of Água Limpa was meagre. Politicians and government agencies would appear on the scene, make promises, and then disappear. Nevertheless, the CEB members decided to persist with their plans and to do whatever part of the work they could do themselves. They organized the work *in mutirão*, i.e. as unpaid work for the benefit of all. One day a week, every household sent at least one man to work. Depending on the tasks to be carried out, more men and also many women were present. The men started digging and cleaning the well, and the women carried away the watery mud. More and more sludge came out of the well and the stench was terrible.

At lunchtime, the workers would rest for a while and then eat together. Usually some of the women prepared a meal from the ingredients the workers had brought to the site. This often resulted in a rather strange lunch, because people sometimes brought a mixture of vegetables and biscuits. But the workers did not mind and usually the lunches were cheerful events.

The Água Limpa project was in many respects an ideal one, in the sense that it was communitarian, sprang from the religious meetings and was obviously inspired by the teachings of liberationist interpretation of the Scripture. The people of the CEB had become aware of their own responsibility for the construction of better living conditions. They no longer accepted the lack of water and did not wait for politicians to solve their problem. If this is what is meant to be the outcome of the raising of consciousness, then the liberationist ideals have reached these people. However, other observations have to be made.

Although all healthy members of the community participated in the work, not everyone felt equally responsible for the job. Overall, most practical decisions were left to João and Alberto. The people would carry out the task of the day, but the overall responsibility was left to the leader of the CEB, João. Probably this was partly the result of his *mini-padre* attitude: because of his knowledge of sacred texts and religious ritual, he was considered an authority in the community. Since the project sprang from the religious community meetings, João's authority was extended to the practical organization of the work.

Also, as the project went on, the involvement of women decreased. This was probably related to the nature of the project: digging is hard work. Still, it also became more of a man's project, notwithstanding the fact that women would benefit more, since they are usually responsible for fetching water for the household. However, an additional reason

might be the fact that the project crossed the boundaries of the sphere of proper female conduct. The type of activities changed as time went on. When the project was stopped for lack of money, the emphasis moved from physical work to negotiating with authorities, agencies and politicians. These activities beyond the community came under the responsibility of the men. Furthermore, this step in the project lent an aura of danger to the undertaking, which added to the division into men's work and women's work.

In fact, among the participants the conviction that the project was going to be a success was not particularly widespread. Many CEB members had their secret doubts. Asked for their ideas on the possible success of the undertaking, they gave answers like: 'I do not know,' 'We will see' and 'If God gives his blessing'. They were reluctant to pin all their hopes on the enterprise. They had never before begun an endeavour like this, and did not know whether it would ever produce the intended result.

The people of Água Limpa were also wary. Since they were now engaging in an endeavour that had previously been unknown to them, they felt unsure about its consequences. Earlier I pointed to the relations of dependence in the local context. In more general terms, people prefer not to have disputes with the powerful. When the idea of the water project came up, the first problem people foresaw was obtaining authorization from the owner of the land where the natural well was located. Although many members of the community were convinced that this man would deny them permission, this first step turned out to be the easiest of all; the landowner even ended up participating in several community meetings in order to help organize the work, and his wife invited the CEB to hold a meeting at her house. However, things can work out differently.

People have good reason to be afraid that their actions will lead to repercussions. For example, the students of the Cajueiro community lost their transport to Caetés because the CEB of Cajueiro supported Jarbas in the 1990 elections. The municipality provided the cars to take the youngsters to school, but now they had to arrange and pay for them themselves. The affair had started on election day, when the voters needed transport to the town. Only those who were going to vote for Joaquim Francisco were picked up in a car; the rest were offered transportation by truck. Some communities that supported the leftist candidate received no transportation at all. To make his point even more clear, the mayor decided to punish the community's students for the rest of the school year by withholding transport to the school in Caetés.

I met yet other examples in the parish of São Vicente. Ideals and the practice of everyday life are often not compatible. It suffices to recall Olívia's fears about losing access to the water on the mayor's property during the teachers' protests in Caetés, or the case of Paulo who decided to seek material help from the mayor of Garanhuns and to repay the favour in the form of political support.

Despite ten years of liberationist practice in their base community, the people of Água Limpa did not work towards the fulfilment of their dream with one conviction and one heart. Despite the weekly ritual enforcement of their unity and the opportunity to put into practice all the teachings of the Bible they had heard, many felt uncertainty and disbelief, inconvenience and fear. Notwithstanding the fact that they were now involved as a community in the construction of better living conditions, for most community members the project was still 'unthinkable'. They simply could not imagine they were capable of

accomplishing the undertaking.

Nevertheless, they participated. Yet their reasons for doing so varied widely. A few would use the liberationist discourse of the organization of the people of God and the *caminhada* of the poor to work towards a better world. Many men and women referred to more general religious ideas of brotherhood and unity. There was the argument that these days the religious included 'working in the community'. Apparently, this was what was expected of a Catholic. Related to this was the esteem for the leader of the CEB (João) who was so enthusiastic and had already introduced good things into their *sítio*, like the weekly meetings. He now needed support. Between the lines there were of course also such motives as selfishness and pragmatism: what if the project became a success and they had not collaborated? Would they, too, have access to the water?

In this process of making meaning of the communitarian endeavour, a continuing process of situational adjustment takes place. The community members must make sense out of new and unknown elements of the religious and social forms. Sometimes different understandings of the world take effect simultaneously, apparently without creating confusion. One woman saw a meaning in the burden of fetching water from a faraway source: "We have to suffer, because we sinned. We have to make up for these sins."⁴³ However, she also participated in the work, since this was 'of the community'. Members of religious groups used known elements to adjust the new ideas to their understandings. The resulting mixture or fusion of elements from different Catholic discourses was also a basic element of the world-view of the members of other lay groups.

A central element of all explications was, again, unity. The unity of the base community, created since João started to organize the weekly meetings, was now expressed in this communitarian project. We have seen the importance of unity in Brazilian culture and its application in the liberationist discourse. For the people of Água Limpa, the water project also signified the celebration of the unity achieved through their religious organization. The concrete activity of building a water supply acquired a timeless dimension through its religious setting. If one conceptualizes this through consciousness and awareness, the conclusion is that the project changed the consciousness of the participants. However, not everyone could grasp the meaning of the project in these terms. In fact, an opposite process took place. By lending it an (un)conscious, timeless meaning, the explicit and concrete became manageable.

In comparison to the project for the construction of the water main in Água Limpa, other projects undertaken by lay groups in the parish were less in line with the ideal picture. We have already seen the campaign for a television set by the CEB of rua Velha (Chapter 6, p. 132). Nevertheless, the differences may not be as large as they seem. The starting points and central symbols of these actions are quite similar to the project of João and his co-members.

HELPING OTHERS

In the previous section I argued that socio-political action is often not intelligible, not 'thinkable' for the people. In contrast, charity or helping others is a far more achievable

43 Interview 901005-162 / sheet 5: "*É preciso a gente sofrer, porque a gente tem pecado. Tem que sofrer para descontar aquele pecado, né.*"

activity. Charity is usually considered a traditional, non-liberationist activity, more linked to old-fashioned devotion and conservative Catholicism and to clientelism. However, devotional practices do not necessarily exclude growing political awareness.

The first reason for this argument is that in the religious practice of the parish of São Vicente, charity often goes hand in hand with a liberationist, political discourse. We have seen that the borders between the different groups are not closed. People may be a member of several groups at the same time. Furthermore, the discourse of liberationist ideals of political action penetrated all groups, not only base communities. The goals of the different groups therefore easily mix.⁴⁴ This indicates that in the communities there may be different perceptions of the goals and significance of certain activities. Furthermore, it suggests that the various types of activities and goals need not be considered contradictory.

Paulo is a good example of a person who sees his work for the *Vicentinos* in the same liberationist project as his evangelization work in the poorest area of the neighbourhood. When talking about his work for this movement he uses the same words he uses for his involvement in base communities, i.e. "compassion and love for others", "assuming responsibility as a Catholic", and "the power of God and the Holy Spirit".

We do nothing, I am sure. We should not be proud because we do nothing. It is the Holy Spirit that does it, it is this Holy Spirit that says "I go in front of you, I am with you, when you think you are alone you are wrong, because I am very near to you." So it is exactly this that every day we meet, and it is good, the work. So we will do this work, if it is God's wish.⁴⁵

Olívia also expressed these values when she explained why she helped Márcia (Chapter 3). The recently founded Legion of Mary collapsed because the women involved in it derived no satisfaction from only devotional activities (Chapter 3). They wanted to act upon their concerns about the needy in their parish. Although the aims of the women were charitable - they wanted to buy food - their insistence on this point contradicted the rules of the movement. Their decision not to continue with the group shows that the liberationist ideas of religious action and personal responsibility had become part of their religious sentiments.

Here we come to the second reason for the similarity between charity and political action. The results of charity might also have a political content. The prayer group of the RCC is a good example of this. The women in the charismatic prayer group also do evangelization work, but they connect it more explicitly to charitable works than base communities do. RCC members carry out evangelization work in the neighbourhood and often encounter families in trouble when they visit homes. In the prayer meetings, participants bring these problems to the group and often it is decided to collect money to help a particular family or individual. The discourse surrounding this charitable work is articulated more

44 This ambiguity also appeared in the research of Valle and Pitta (1994) mentioned in Chapter 2. In the responses to the questions designed to make the distinction between CECs and CEBs (in which the former would not have a political dimension), some respondents connected trade unions with local socioeconomic - and thus not political - action, while others connected *Vicentinos* with political action (1994:16).

45 Interview 900528-70 / sheet 14: "A gente não faz nada, eu tenho certeza, a gente não deve se empolgar que faz nada, é o Espírito Santo que faz, é esse Espírito que faz, que diz eu vou na sua frente, eu estou com você, quando você pensa que está sozinho é engano, porque eu estou bem juntinho de você." Então justamente é isso [que] todo dia a gente encontra, e é bom os trabalhos. Aí nós vamos para esse trabalho se Deus quiser."

clearly than for the CEBS. Rosa, a leader of the group in Colina, said:

We seek growing spirituality, maturation. When we take the Word of God to homes, this makes the people grow spiritually in the faith (...). At the same time we help people who are most in need, we buy them food.

In this way the quest for a deepening of the personal contact with God does not rule out an eye for social injustice in society.

The testifying that is such an important component of the prayer meetings also induces awareness of societal problems. The testimonies are usually stories of personal suffering and God's help in overcoming the problem. The personal suffering of most people has a lot to do with the social injustice of Brazilian society, e.g. unemployment, low salaries and unhealthy conditions. Although triggering a process of political raising of consciousness is not the goal of the prayer groups, for many people their involvement in the group had this effect. I already mentioned the campaign for the PT and its candidate, Lula, carried out by a group of young members at the time of the elections (p.151). In several other cases, the religious activities of the RCC also turned out to be quite liberationist and political.

One such action was the foundation of a day-care centre for street children. The women of the prayer group had encountered many children with problems during their visits to families in the neighbourhood. Many children did not go to school and wandered the streets of the town centre from early morning till late at night. The day-care centre founded in Colina by a group of volunteers from the *Cursilho* would not accept these children, because they were *mal educado* (ill-mannered) and did not conform to the rules, such as arriving at fixed hours. Furthermore, the kids had stolen things from the centre. In all, this was a group of street children that did not fit in the existing structure of reception centres. After discussing this problem, the women conceived the plan of starting their own day-care centre for them. The monks of São Bento donated land in the centre of town, and all the local prayer groups contributed money and labour for the construction of the facility. Women now work as volunteers for one or two days a week in the new day-care centre. This is a concrete result of the local elaboration of Charismatic belief in a context of liberationist Catholic discourse. It can be considered political because it was empowering for the women involved in it. *Dona Joanina*, for example, told with great pride about her work and the fact that her group had accomplished all this. It was also a political deed because it was a comment on Brazilian society and the local politicians who did nothing for street children.

On another occasion, an act of charity by the Charismatics was seen as being even more critical of local politics. In 1989 the street sweepers went on strike because they had not been paid for several months. Since these workers are on the lowest salary scale, their reserves are insufficient for them to survive such a period. The strikers set up camp on the main avenue in Garanhuns and planned to stay there until they received the salary they deserved. Meanwhile, they had nothing to eat. Contrary to all expectations, it was the RCC prayer groups of Garanhuns - and not the syndicate, or a political party or the liberationist church - which decided to support the street sweepers. The women of the prayer groups started a campaign to collect food and clothes for them. Of course, this can be labelled a charitable action. However, most important, they also started to sit with the strikers in the camp in the centre of town. Here, their deeds gained a more political

meaning, at least as a criticism of the policy of the mayor and his staff.

All these actions organized by the laity of the groups in the parish of São Vicente entailed some measure of collective responsibility and self-activation. The laity acted upon their understanding of societal problems by applying their interpretation of Catholicism, liberationist or not. A basic element in the projects developed by the laity was the unity they experienced as a group of similarly minded faithful. The idealized unity of all Catholics gave further power to the ideas and plans. Yet, unity will never be fully achieved. Nevertheless, the unity that has been accomplished is a good basis from which to start helping others, to answer God's call for compassion and to implement the preferential option for the poor. In this sense, charity is a viable mediation of liberationist Catholicism.

RELIGIOUS SOURCES

All the communitarian actions described here - the water project of Água Limpa, the day-care centre in Garanhuns, the campaign for the PT - sprang from religious groups, and all continue to have this connection with the religious. In fact, the relation with the religious was what kept the actions going on.

First, the religious serves as an inspiration. The source of the action is closely connected to the religious community, and the experience of community continues to be a fundamental element of motivation for the communitarian action. This is a powerful aspect of religious groups. Above, we saw that people who are not sure of the outcome of an action continue to participate because they feel they are part of the group. The explication 'this is what religion is these days' also emphasizes this aspect. It is the commonality of a religious sentiment that binds together the members of lay groups.

Second, the religious also offers a language with which to communicate the values and sentiments involved in communitarian actions. Each time rituals are performed, the unity and religious sources are reinforced. For example, the work of the CEB of Água Limpa always included prayers at lunchtime. Often João would read from the Bible and there would be a discussion about the contents of this. It is not necessarily the content of the Bible readings that counts, but the act as such, the ritualized performance and expression of unity.

Third, the religious also legitimizes the projects of the religious groups. This legitimization functions towards the outside world, but also towards the group members themselves and their families. During the water project in Água Limpa, the leaders of the project - João and Alberto - invited the parish priest to participate in a community meeting. The two community leaders had not prepared this particular meeting because they thought that the priest would give a sermon. Both men were a little nervous because of the presence of the priest, and they were very eager to receive consent for their project. After all, they had started to do what he always preached. They hoped that perhaps he would provide the much needed help by arranging the necessary building materials. Yet the priest had only prayers to offer. However, for the people it was very important that he gave his spiritual help to the CEB. Even in situations where a community is relatively self-supporting in religious matters, the approval of a priest or other religious authority is important.

Fourth, the religious context of the work establishes a connection between the local groups and communities and a larger frame of meaning. The global Catholic church or

the Catholic church in Brazil furnishes this larger frame as an institution, different from the state, and as a community of faithful, in relation to God.

All these aspects of the religious make liberationist ideals a powerful means with which to achieve its goals. However, simultaneously the undetermined nature of religious language and ritual also beget its weakness. By this I mean that the many open ends in the liberationist campaign make outcomes unpredictable. For example, the same language that serves to motivate and justify the water project in Água Limpa offered Paulo a means to explain his personal political conduct. Paulo was very grateful for the help of the mayor. He explained he had done a lot for the community and now 'the community' was doing something in return. He said: "I don't know how to thank; this must be the Holy Spirit."⁴⁶

To establish the results of a planned process of religious meaning-making as for the goal of consciousness-raising seems an unattainable task. During the process, the variation in goals, meanings, interpretations and motives created countless mutual misunderstandings and unplanned actions. The structural position of the actors combined with their continuous quest for meaning led to an ongoing process of situational adjustment. From the point of view of the liberationist *basistas*, there were as many failed as successful projects.

Nevertheless, the clergy might consider a revision of its definition of success, as is suggested by the course the charismatic prayer groups have taken in the parish of São Vicente. Father Milton was always criticizing the RCC for not offering a critical perspective or engagement in relation to the social injustices of Brazilian society. The members of the prayer group were very aware of his opposition to their work. Joanina said: "Father Milton says the Charismatics are only occupied with praise, and do nothing for the community. But we do. We do a lot." For Joanina, it is not a question of devotion or social action: she fuses these different elements together in a united religious practice. In this, she does not differ from the CEB members who translate the liberationist call for political action into a campaign to buy a television set for a sick girl. Nor does the result of their religious actions differ.

In sum, the question of consciousness and political action can be resolved if we accept that the laity may have another interpretation of what constitutes political action. In the conception of the members of base communities, the charismatic prayer group, the Legion of Mary and the *Apostolado*, the core of the political rhetoric is 'helping others' and 'doing something for the community'. Lay women and men devote much energy and time to the realization of this end.

AWARENESS AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The actions of the members of the lay groups in the parish are not unreflective reproductions of religious customs. All make sense considering the cultural resources on hand, and the religious is a powerful part of these. The contemporary liberationist campaign has modified the content of the religious, but has also built on the existing norms and belief. Above all, liberationist Catholicism introduced alternative perspectives on the social world.

46 Record 900924-124: "Não sei como agradecer. Isso deve ser o espírito santo."

The members of lay groups gained access to information and methods that helped enhance their awareness of the political and social context of their personal life situation.⁴⁷ In their religious actions, democratic values, co-responsibility for the religious and concern for the poor and needy in their communities all became central elements. In this respect, the consciousness of the faithful changed.

The point here is that changes in consciousness do not translate directly into awareness, let alone into political action. The process is much more complicated than that. First, of course, we are talking about a specific type of awareness. The liberationist ideals are the formation of critical political analysis. Although it can be argued that this is as much related as the religious is to general ideas about how the world is and should be, we have seen that for most lay people politics and religion, however they are defined, continue to constitute two different realities that are difficult to combine.

Secondly, for understandings at the level of consciousness - the implicit and timeless understandings of the world - to become explicit awareness in the here and now, there must be a corresponding reality. The implicit ideas must become intelligible. The three steps of the liberationist teachings - to see, to judge and to act - must be within reach. Even if an awareness of alternative practices becomes visible to the laity, there have to be cultural opportunities present in order to translate this awareness into practice. Structural possibilities must favour potential changes.

Only then can a motivation to strive for alternative actions develop. Motivation is the link between culture and action (d'Andrade 1992:41), but it is also formed in the cultural and social world. I would argue that the possibilities for the actors are still limited in this respect. The aspirations of most CEB members with respect to activity in the political were quite modest. The analysis of the concrete results of the liberationist campaign showed that the majority of religious actions consist of reproduction and continuity. The liberationist discourse is mediated within the limits of the social and cultural order. Is that what the actors want? It is, because the dreams and desires in the timeless dimension of consciousness only become concrete awareness in situatedness of the here and now.

7.6 Conclusion: agency and meaning

This chapter focussed on the concrete consequences for the laity of the Catholic religious groups of the liberationist ideology concerning the engagement in politics and the process of *conscientização*. In the course of the analysis, both 'politics' and '*conscientização*' needed explication and refinement.

Regarding politics - or the political, as I prefer it - many different understandings were encountered. The topic created both unity and disagreement in the religious. Notwithstanding the many different interpretations of the political and of the liberationist campaign, the lay actors experienced their beliefs as a shared religion. The public symbols were very public, so to say. Concerning *conscientização*, it proved useful to make an analytical distinction between consciousness and awareness, timelessness and the here and now,

47 Of course, the religious order was not the only means that enhanced this access to information. I can not go into the other means here, but especially TV also opened new perspectives on the world for many poor people.

implicitness and explicitness.

Several researchers have tried to evaluate the accomplishments of the liberationist campaign with regard to the goal of raising the consciousness of the laity. They did so in terms of political awareness of the members of base communities. The conclusion then is that Brazilian CEBs do not fulfil the promise of shaping 'conscious' Catholics. One indication for this result is found in data on voting behaviour, assuming a direct line between liberationist Catholicism and leftist secular politics and reducing consciousness to political awareness. Another reason is found in the observation that in recent years participants in CEBs have been directing more attention to devotional practices (Hewitt 1990:146, Cavendish 1993:18). This last interpretation suggests an opposition between the practice of consciousness-raising and that of devotion. In day-to-day practice, the liberationist clergy also use this distinction, as was shown above. Nevertheless, the perceptions of the laity are not well represented with a dualistic argument.

Perhaps we should search for the central elements of the meaning-making in the parish of São Vicente at the more general level of cultural processes. What induced many actions and non-actions was the large degree of inconsistency and contradiction in the liberationist campaign. The clergy bring about uncertainty because they preach different things, and they create confusion because their behaviour concerning the division of tasks and responsibilities in the parish is unpredictable. Another source of contradiction lay in the combination of religious instructions with the social reality. The problems and obstacles encountered in day-to-day reality make it very difficult to put the political ideals of liberationist Catholicism into practice. People continue to live in poverty and are dependent on local politicians and landowners alike.

These contradictions and inconsistencies force the faithful to constantly readjust to the situation. This is not to say that people are simply puppets on a string, responding to demands made upon them from the outside. We have seen many instances in which the laity showed that they were well aware of this situation and creatively used the indeterminacy of the religious to make it fit their needs and beliefs. Nevertheless, their possibilities are limited.

The appeal of this way of conceptualizing the religious change under study is that it clarifies the relation between ideas and practices. Because the religious is more about doing than about thinking, the consciousness of the actors largely guides the situational adjustment. Implicit ideas of what the religious entails and which values are important are engendered. When people start to act upon these implicit religious beliefs they become aware of them and are motivated to act.

Under some circumstances, the resulting activity corresponds with the ideals of liberationist Catholicism, but in many other situations it does not. The water project in Água Limpa came nearest to the goals of the liberationist campaign. However, this was more so for its result than for the course of the actions and motivations.

The political activities of the other lay groups that resulted from the religious change centred on the values of unity and helping others. Under the generalized liberationist campaign, this applied not only to the base communities but also to the other lay groups. In the day-to-day reality of the parish, we must conclude that the different ideologies of the CEBs, the Apostleship of Prayer and the Charismatic prayer group lead to much the

same results with regard to their social activism. In the process of mediation, most groups make political conscientization intelligible by translating it into charitable actions.

8 God writes right along winding lines

*There are various religions, so one choses one and stays. So I stayed in the one I was born in and it is fine.*¹

For Teresa, the answer to the main question of this book - how liberationist Catholicism works out in the everyday religious practice and meanings of the laity - is clear. She is a Catholic and will remain a Catholic. This is not as logical or natural as her words make it seem. She is aware of the many different religious options that are open to her; she even 'shopped around' in other churches for a while (p.126). She also discerns various forms of the religious within the Catholic order, some of which she does not like at all (p.127). Nevertheless, she feels part of the Catholic community and this is a meaningful aspect of her life.

This book focussed on the collective actions undertaken by members of the various lay groups in the parish, and the understandings of the social and religious order from which these groups sprang and which they helped form. I sought to understand the contemporary religious order in the parish as influenced by the liberationist campaign. The liberationist campaign aimed at introducing an alternative religious and political practice. Here I will bring together the evidence presented above. In this assessment of the results of the liberationist campaign, I will also evaluate the theoretical devices I used to come to these conclusions.

It all boils down to the question of change. Is it possible for the religious to inspire significant changes? And if so, are such changes desirable? For changes to take place, two conditions must be fulfilled: alternative actions and ideas must become intelligible to the actors, and the actors must have the motivation and the autonomy or power to pursue the changes.

IDEOLOGY: PRACTICE APPROACH FOR HISTORICAL CHANGE

In the previous chapters, many instances of change - but also of continuity - have been shown. Developments over long periods merit attention because changes generally take place very slowly, due to the conservative character of the cultural order (cf. Salman 1993:104). Therefore, it is enlightening to look at historical development. This offers insight into how people react to external phenomena, how they live with these or adapt them to their own conveniences.

The point is not, of course, that people make their history through this constant process of constraint and opportunity. That is a platitude. What is important is the manner in which this takes place. A practice approach provides a device with which to discover the peculiarities of the social and cultural dynamics that help people to make history. In the first part of this book, I adopted the concepts of order and cultural campaigns in order to describe the historical development of Catholicism in the parish of São Vicente.

With respect to the religious order in São Vicente, the first - and obvious - important point is that this local Catholicism is to a large extent formed by processes on a much

¹ Interview 910313-250 / sheet 22: "*Agora existe diversas religiões então a gente escolhe uma e fica, então eu fico na que eu nasci e 'tá boa.*" The title of the chapter comes from a popular saying among the people of the parish: (*É aquela história que Deus escreve certo por linhas tortas*) (It is this story [that] God writes right along winding lines).

larger, extra-local scale. Accordingly, using a practice approach provided a device with which to analyse the situation on the small scale of the Colina neighbourhood and the surrounding rural communities in the context of the larger religious and social order. This device was the conceptualization of these larger processes as a cultural campaign.

What were the consequences of the liberationist cultural campaign? On the one hand, liberationist Catholicism has led to the establishment of a number of new norms in the religious order; we might even speak of a *new* religious order. The most important characteristic of this new order is that the role of the laity has become more important than before in the local organization of the religious. Liberationist Catholicism supports greater autonomy for the laity and the decentralization of institutional power.

On the other hand, this norm is also one of the factors that impede the widespread integration of liberationist Catholic ideals in the religious. The laity are responsible for a large part of religious activities and routines. They have considerable liberty in choosing the forms and contents they use. The members of religious groups have every opportunity to maintain their own interpretation of Catholicism. The result is that the laity take decisions without consulting the clergy and can give their own content to their religious group.

The inspirations and motivations of the laity come not only from the liberationist campaign, but also from earlier campaigns (and what remains locally or has been reconstructed from them) and other elements in the wider religious realm.

With respect to the results of the liberationist campaign, this means that the base communities are not as special as is often assumed. The CEBs and the other groups are just one aspect of the broader spectrum of religious ideas and activities, as was shown particularly in Chapters 3 and 5. As one type of groups, the CEBs are associations of lay people, but there also are many other groups. It also means there is a considerable continuity in the religious order, rituals and beliefs. The laity have integrated the CEBs into the existing religious order.

In the liberationist model of base communities, religious self-sufficiency is the norm, as for instance the prayer meetings of the *Apostolado da Oração* were before. The character of this liberationist norm, however, opens up possibilities for other initiatives. This local elaboration might, based on ideological grounds, challenge the general opinion as happens with base communities, which limit their activities to devotional practices, or charismatic prayer groups, which carry out social work with street children.

This is not to say that ideological differences do not matter. However, I would argue that at the local level the ideological differences between Liberationist Catholicism and Charismatic Catholicism are far less important than is often assumed. The laity give less attention to ideology in their meetings. Ideological differences, although not absent, are less pronounced.

In Colina and in Garanhuns in general, liberation theology has now been the leading ideology for more than twenty years. This means that people have been exposed to liberationist teachings for quite some time. These ideas have become part of the religious practices and beliefs of most parishioners, whether they are members of base communities or of other groups. Central elements in the discourses and practices of different groups become not so different from each other in the context in which this religious construction takes place. All actors have to deal with the same conditions, that is, the norm of co-

responsibility and self-management in the organization of the religious, and - complicating that - the continuing authority of the priest. Thus, all groups operate within the same symbolic and social structure.

Furthermore, as we have seen in the foregoing pages, people are both constrained and motivated by structures other than the religious. In other words, the extent to which the liberationist campaign succeeded in the endeavour to make change possible depends not only on the religious order. Change in the religious context means that the Church helps people to see and materialize alternative practices, not only religious but also social and political practices. On the question of materializing social and political change, we can be brief - that is, if we think of the kind of revolutionary change that *basistas* and others once expected. Many examples showed that the poor people who were expected to overturn oppression and injustice simply did not have the power to materialize profound changes in society. This is not the whole story, however. The problem was shown to also lie in the motivation and ability of the actors to imagine change. Therefore, we had to turn to the potential of the liberationist campaign to 'change the minds of the people'.

CONSCIOUSNESS: MEDIATION OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS

The use of a practice approach revealed the continuous tension between ideas and their practical application in daily reality. This tension was one of the engines that drove the process of mediation of the religious ideals propagated in the liberationist campaign.

Several structural factors fuelled the engines of mediation. Gender proved to be fundamental. Not only does the structural and symbolic position of women limit the nature and frequency of their participation, but ideals of femaleness form the religious identity of male participants. However, because of the numerical preponderance of women in the religious, they are the main constructors of the form and content of the religious groups.

An equally strong influence on the reception and reinterpretation of liberationist Catholicism comes from the structural poverty and political dependence of the poor in the parish of São Vicente. Power relations are important not only in wider society but also in the religious. Notwithstanding the democratization efforts of the clergy and the local institutional church, the power and authority of the priest often continue to be exercised in an unpredictable manner.

This shows some of the limits to campaigns of cultural politics. These limits are formed not only by the 'receivers' but also by the 'senders' of new ideas and goals. For the laity in Garanhuns, the new ideas were not always clear. Different priests spread different ideologies and gave conflicting advice. The responsibility to create the religious therefore resides for a large part in the hands of the laity, who have to make choices and make meaning out of many possibilities. In the religious groups under study, the results of this process were three very central concepts: community, unity and helping others.

In the end, the goal of a cultural campaign is to change the minds of the people. Liberationist Catholicism aimed to achieve this through the process of conscientization. The ritualization of the new ideas prove to be more influential than the ideological discourse. Meaning is an emergent property of the experiences induced by ritual.

LINKING THE RELIGIOUS WITH LIFE

The meaning and purpose of the religious acts of the people of the parish of São Vicente is an inherent element of their lives. If one basic premise was confirmed through the analysis pursued here, then it is the dynamic nature of the religious. The Catholics of Colina and the rural part of the parish of São Vicente cannot rely on one coherent, single world-view. Instead, they have to constantly try to distill meaning from a multitude of religious discourses and practices. They are always searching, trying to understand, fitting into their lives, responding to their personal and collective needs and wishes. In this respect, there is no difference between the lay groups. The members of all groups want to find an adequate way to express their religious feelings and beliefs. Their membership is an answer to this need in a more or less satisfying way. This does not mean, however, that this answer is necessarily perfect or complete from the onset. What we have seen is ongoing activity and even struggle to achieve the satisfactory forms and meanings.

Interestingly, liberationist clerics support the faithful in their attempts to link their daily lives with the gospel. Seen from this perspective, we could say that the parishioners of São Vicente are followers of the ideas proclaimed by liberationist Catholicism.

What is important in these findings is that the differences and ideological divisions that are supposed to exist between different groups - and particularly between base communities and the Charismatics - are not as large at the local level. The explanation for this lies in the power of the liberationist campaign, which extends beyond the CEBs. Simultaneously, it points to the weakness of its ideals. As long as the socioeconomic and political structures of injustice do not change, the desired cultural and religious change will not easily materialize. The most important of the constraining structures identified in this book are the local and national division of power and access to economic sources, and the gender ideology within the religious and within the wider society. The result of these cultural and structural constraints on the religious order is a fairly uniform shape and scheme of activities of the lay groups.

For the study of contemporary Catholicism in Brazil, this is an interesting finding. The growing charismatic movement is usually presented as a conservative, apolitical group. Generally it is argued that the emphasis on personal spiritual development in the RCC contradicts interest in (communitarian) social issues. Della Cava (1990:3) called the RCC "the antithesis of liberation theology", which stresses political and social consciousness. Comblin (1983:258) presented the argument that internationally organized movements like the RCC are indifferent to the situation in specific countries, precisely because of their global orientation. The evidence presented in this book serves as a counter-argument: it can be argued that exactly because the international and national headquarters of the RCC do not pay much attention to social and political issues, this leaves room for local elaboration of religious ideas. In Garanhuns, the laity on several occasions turned upside down the presumed roles of the RCC and the CEBs (cf. De Theije 1999).

All that is God's is good. In the parish of São Vicente, this includes the meetings of the base communities, the monthly meetings of the Apostleship of Prayer, the day-care centre founded by the Charismatics, the visits to the sick by members of the Legion of Mary, and many other more organized occasions. Of course, it also includes individual acts of piety, such as the occasional visit to the shrine of Santa Quitéria or the prayer

said before going to sleep. Between the lines of customary activities and beliefs, however, the religious order in the parish of São Vicente has changed over the last few decades - or perhaps I should say it has changed *because of* the customary activities and beliefs. As a trustful and hopeful community member said: God writes right along winding lines.

Glossary

<i>abertura</i>	gradual political opening , democratization
<i>agreste</i>	Region of the Northeast between well-watered <i>zona da mata</i> and semi-arid <i>sertão</i>
<i>almas penadas</i>	suffering, tormented souls
ARENA	<i>Aliança Renovadora Nacional</i> - National Reform Alliance for the government; political party
<i>assembléia diocesana</i>	annual meeting of the bishopric during which pastoral matters are discussed and new plans are made.
<i>assentamento</i>	provisional camp on land occupied by landless peasants
<i>assessor</i>	advisor, resource person
<i>assombrado/a</i>	haunted
<i>banco de sementes</i>	communal seed-bank
<i>batina</i>	cassock
<i>beato</i>	pious person; also: sanctimonious person; (female) <i>beata</i> : church spinster (i.e. a woman who is "married" to the church)
<i>biscateiro</i>	odd-jobber
<i>caixa comunitária</i>	communal fund
<i>caminhada</i>	in liberationist discourse: the pilgrimage of the people of God
<i>campanha da fraternidade</i>	brotherhood or Lenten campaign
<i>cana de açúcar</i>	sugarcane
<i>capitania</i>	the first administrative division of Brazil (province)
<i>capitão-mor</i>	governor of <i>capitania</i>
<i>carro de boi</i>	ox cart
<i>casa de farinha</i>	mill in which manioc flour is made
<i>catimbozeiro</i>	practitioner of <i>catimbó</i> , a type of black magic associated with Afro-Brazilian religious practices
CEB	<i>Comunidade Eclesial de Base</i> - ecclesial base community
CELAM	<i>Conselho Episcopal Latino-Americano</i> - Latin American Bishops Conference
CERIS	<i>Centro de Estatística Religiosa e Investigações Sociais</i> - Centre for Religious Statistics and Social Investigations
Cimi	<i>Conselho Missionário Indígena</i> - Indigenous Missionary Council
CNBB	<i>Conferência Nacional de Bispos Brasileiros</i> - National Bishops' Conference
<i>comadre</i>	1.godmother, in relation to the godchild's parents 2.mother, in relation to child's godparents
<i>compadre</i>	1. godfather, in relation to the godchild's parents 2. father, in relation to child's godparents
<i>compromisso</i>	engagement
<i>conscientização</i>	goal of liberationist Catholicism; consciousness raising

CPT	<i>Comissão da Pastoral de Terra</i> , Pastoral Land Commission
<i>crente</i>	Protestant believer
<i>Dona</i>	Polite title for a woman (used for women of all social classes)
<i>Doutor</i>	Polite title for males of high social status
<i>empregada</i>	maid
<i>escolinha de fé</i>	course on the doctrine of liberationist Catholicism, Bible class
<i>evangelizador</i>	evangelist, lay preacher
FASE	<i>Federação de Órgãos para Assistência Social e Educacional</i> - Association of Organizations for Social and Educational Assistance; non-governmental organization dedicated to development and educational work.
<i>favela</i>	shantytown
<i>fazenda</i>	large rural landholding devoted to cattle or crops
<i>fazendeiro</i>	owner of a fazenda
<i>friar</i>	friar
<i>frevo</i>	a jumping carnival dance from Pernambuco
IBGE	<i>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</i> - Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
<i>irmã</i>	sister; religious sister, nun
<i>irmandade</i>	religious brotherhood
<i>lambada</i>	type of music popular at the end of the 1980s
<i>légua</i>	measure of distance; in Brazil equal to 6,000 meters; in the case of a sesmaria 6,600 meters
<i>Ligas Camponesas</i>	Peasant Leagues
<i>lobisomem</i>	werewolf
<i>machão</i>	strong, virile male
<i>machismo</i>	belief in superiority of males
<i>madrinha</i>	godmother
<i>mal educado</i>	ill-mannered
<i>mau olhado</i>	evil eye
<i>marianismo</i>	beliefs and practices concerning the position of women in society
MDB	<i>Movimento Democrático Brasileiro</i> - Brazilian Democratic Movement, political party
MEB	<i>Movimento de Educação de Base</i> - Movement for Basic Education
<i>missão popular</i>	religious services carried out by Redemptorist missionaries to arouse religious interest for liberationist Catholicism
<i>município</i>	municipality, administrative subdivision of a state. The name of the <i>município</i> and its seat are the same
<i>mutirão</i>	cooperative work party

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<i>novena</i>	prayer or devotion repeated during nine days, usually preceding religious festival
<i>padre</i>	priest, Father
<i>padrinho</i>	godfather
<i>palma</i>	plant of the family Cactaceae, <i>Opuntia</i> spp, cultivated as cattle fodder in the Northeast
<i>pardo</i>	brown, dark skinned, mulatto
<i>pelego</i>	straw leader
<i>pistoleiro</i>	hired gunman, bandit
<i>preto</i>	black, African-Brazilian
<i>promessa</i>	vow to a saint
PT	<i>Partido dos Trabalhadores</i> - Worker's Party
<i>quimbo</i>	settlement of fugitive slaves
<i>reisado</i>	dramatic dance (usually performed on January 6 th , the feast of the Epiphany)
<i>roteiro</i>	manual, guide-book
<i>semana santa</i>	Holy Week
<i>senhor</i>	Polite title for a man
<i>sertão</i>	Semi-arid region to the west of the agreste
<i>sesmaria</i>	allotment: plot of uncultivated land assigned to settlers by the Portuguese kings
<i>seu</i>	colloquial abbreviation for <i>senhor</i>
<i>sítio</i>	country place; also: small farm
SORPE	<i>Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco</i> - Pernambucan Service of Rural Orientation
SUDENE	<i>Superintendência do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste</i> - Superintendency for Development of the Northeast
<i>tele novela</i>	Brazilian soap opera, prime-time serial that appears every night, produced by the national television networks
<i>terço</i>	rosary
Umbanda	Afro-Brazilian spirit possession religion
<i>velório</i>	deathwatch, lyke-wake; wake in general
<i>venda</i>	simple grocery shop
<i>ver, julgar, agir</i>	to see, to judge, to act
<i>via sacra</i>	holy way, Stations of the Cross, <i>via Crucis</i>
Xangô	Afro-Brazilian spirit possession religion (name in Pernambuco and Alagoas, comparable to Candomblé in other parts of Brazil)
<i>Zona da Mata</i>	Region of the Northeast along the humid east coast. Name derives from the former forest cover

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Summary in Dutch / Samenvatting

ALLES VAN GOD IS GOED. EEN ANTROPOLOGISCHE STUDIE VAN KATHOLICISME VAN DE BEVRIDING IN GARANHUNS, BRAZILIË.

“Alles van God is goed,” is een veelgehoorde mening in de parochie van São Vicente in Garanhuns. Het betekent dat de mensen veel vormen van geloof en uitingen daarvan legitiem en zinvol achten. Voor de meeste leken is dit het antwoord op de centrale vraag van mijn onderzoek. Die luidde hoe en met welke resultaten het beleid van het bisdom, dat sterk beïnvloed was door bevrijdingstheologische ideeën, invloed heeft op de religieuze gebruiken en overtuigingen van de parochianen in een parochie in Noordoost Brazilië. Bij de beantwoording van deze vraag ging de meeste aandacht uit naar basisgemeenschappen en andere vormen van lekenorganisatie.

In het eerste hoofdstuk wordt het onderwerp gepresenteerd door een beschrijving van de gebeurtenissen op de jaarvergadering van het bisdom, waaraan de clerus maar ook vele leken deelnemen. Het bisdom staat bekend als een “progressief” bisdom dat sinds het begin van de jaren zeventig een beleid voert dat sterk geïnspireerd is door de bevrijdingstheologie. Desalniettemin blijken er bij de participanten vele verschillende opvattingen te leven over de weg die de lokale kerk moet gaan.

In het tweede hoofdstuk worden de studies die over het onderwerp bestaan in drie groepen ingedeeld en besproken. Een belangrijke overeenkomst blijkt dan te zijn dat de leken weinig aandacht kregen en dat de culturele geworteldheid van de religieuze overtuigingen en handelingen ondergewaardeerd is. De meeste studies over de bevrijdingstheologie richten zich op de theologische of de kerkpolitieke aspecten. Die zijn natuurlijk belangrijk, maar voor het succes was de beweging toch afhankelijk van de toepassing die de nieuwe ideeën vonden in de dagelijkse praktijk van de leken. Een zogenaamde *practice* benadering biedt een mogelijkheid om beide niveau's in samenwerking met elkaar te analyseren. Daarom kies ik in dit boek voor zo'n benadering. Mijn uitwerking van de *practice* behelst een combinatie van twee perspectieven. Het eerste is dat van de rol van veranderings campagnes in wat ik noem de publieke symbolische orde. Het tweede dat van de uitkomsten van het proces van mediatie van die publieke symbolische orde op het niveau van het bewustzijn van de betrokkenen.

De publieke symbolische orde, of in dit geval de religieuze orde, wordt niet alleen gevormd door campagnes die door bepaalde groepen, hier de clerus, gevoerd worden. De mensen in de parochie waren al katholiek, hadden al een geloof en religieuze activiteiten. Dit aspect van de religieuze orde wordt beschreven in hoofdstuk 3. De grenzen tussen katholieke gebruiken en niet-katholieke blijken dan vaak moeilijk te trekken. Bovendien laat ik zien dat ik het onderscheid tussen volkskatholicisme en officieel catholicisme niet relevant en bruikbaar vind. In hoofdstuk vier wordt de historische ontwikkeling van de contemporaine publieke symbolische orde beschreven. In de drie eeuwen sinds de eerste kolonisten zich vestigden in Garanhuns en omstreken, heeft de Rooms katholieke kerk zich steeds beter georganiseerd. Met name de laatste eeuw heeft de clerus verschillende campagne's gevoerd om nieuwe ideeën en praktijken te introduceren. Analyse van deze historische ontwikkeling toont dat sommige elementen van campagne's navolging vonden en andere niet. Het perspectief op de publieke symbolische orde laat ook zien dat de vorming van katholieke basisgemeenschappen niet los staat van eerdere

veranderingsprocessen in het katholicisme. In het vijfde hoofdstuk wordt dit opnieuw bekeken aan de hand van de huidige stand van zaken in de organisatie van het geloof in de parochie. Dan komen duidelijk de overeenkomsten en verschillen met voorgaande veranderingsbewegingen naar voren. Een belangrijke overeenkomst is dat het initiëren van lekenverenigingen steeds een middel was in de campagne's. Een belangrijk verschil is dat tegenwoordig de mate van autonomie van de lekgroepen zeer groot is, met vaak verrassende resultaten.

In het volgende deel van het boek verschuift het perspectief naar de uitkomsten van het veranderingsstreven van de liberationist campagne. Immers, het uiteindelijke doel was (en is) "de hoofden van de mensen" te veranderen. Hoe gaan de leken om met de nieuwe omstandigheden die in de kerk ontstaan zijn? Op welke manier krijgt het bevrijdingstheologische discours betekenis in het dagelijkse leven van de arme mannen en vrouwen in de parochie? In hoofdstuk 6 wordt uitgebreid ingegaan op de achtergronden van de deelnemers aan de religieuze groepen, de verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen, tussen rurale en urbane groepen, en tussen verschillende soorten groepen. De meeste leden van basissgemeenschappen, maar ook van andere groepen zoals het Apostolaat van het gebed en de Charismatische Vernieuwing zijn vrouwen. Voor de activiteiten die de groepen ontwikkelen blijkt dat zeer belangrijk. Het is een van de factoren die bijdragen aan een specifieke interpretatie en uitwerking van de *liberationist* ideologie.

In het laatste hoofdstuk van het boek wordt deze conclusie verder uitgewerkt en verduidelijkt door de betekenis van de politieke boodschap van de bevrijdingstheologie aan een nader onderzoek te onderwerpen. Immers, in de liberationist campagne was het letterlijk de bedoeling het bewustzijn van de arme gelovigen te veranderen, opdat zij de politieke consequenties uit hun geloof zouden kunnen trekken. Onder meer aan de hand van reacties van mensen op seculier politieke ontwikkelingen in Brazilië en een uitgebreid beschreven project voor de aanleg van een waterput door een van de bestudeerde basissgemeenschappen, zien we allerlei uitwerkingen van de politieke betekenis van het geloof. Uit de analyse blijkt politieke actie voor veel leken een ongewenste, niet te bevatten of niet uitvoerbare uitwerking van hun geloof. Bovendien blijkt in de praktijk dat andere lekenverenigingen dan basissgemeenschappen, speciaal de charismatische groepen, via een andere weg vaak tot de zelfde maatschappelijke acties komen. Dit laatste is een interessante conclusie met betrekking tot het Braziliaanse katholicisme omdat meestal beweerd wordt dat de charismatische groepen in de kerk "conservatief" zijn en een tegenpool van de basissgemeenschappen. Mijn onderzoek laat zien dat in de praktijk van een parochie de verschillen niet zo groot zijn. Dat komt onder andere doordat veel leken van beide groepen lid zijn, of in dezelfde sociaal-economische omstandigheden en dezelfde publiek symbolische orde leven. Ideologische verschillen zijn ondergeschikt aan het streven naar eenheid en dienstbaarheid aan God en medemensen. Voor dit doel is "alles van God goed."

Curriculum vitae

Marjo de Theije was born in Hulst, the Netherlands, in 1963. She studied Anthropology at Utrecht University, where she earned her BA (1985) and MA (1988) in Social Cultural Sciences. From 1985 to 1988, she worked as a teaching assistant at the Department of Cultural Anthropology at that university. She embarked upon the research that would culminate in this book in 1989.

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